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"BACK!" SHOUTED THE MAD WOMAN, AS SHE LIFTED THE DYING MAN IN HER ARMS.

A VILLAGE BELLE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(Continued.)

CHAPTER VI.

THE courage that had sustained Kate so wonderfully under her terrible ordeal, gave way when she found herself in her own apartment, under the sympathising, motherly care of good old Betsy.

"You positively take my breath away," gasped Betsy, on hearing of the scene in the sick room. "Not his wife! Why, there's proof! Ain't he your boy's father?"

"Perhaps it was only a sham marriage, Betsy!" Kate said, brokenly.

"That's for him to prove, not you, my poor darling. It's as well your dear mother went to

her rest when she did; this would have broken her heart."

"Ah, me! Betsy! the sin of deceit and disobedience has found me out. I threw aside the love of a good man for one who has proved himself a monster of cruelty."

"You are his wife! Never mind what he says," protested Betsy, warmly; "and he can't wriggle out of it if you stand firm. If I was in your place I'd put 'Countess' on my cards, and let him dare to say you have no right to do it. You have plenty of money and a true, loyal friend in Mr. Osborne. Write to him at once and strike this villain down before he has time to plot against you. Mark my words, that woman, for she is no lady, will stop at nothing to get rid of you—not even at murder. I could see it in her spiteful face and blazing eyes."

"I will fight for honour's sake," cried Kate, drying her eyes, "and my boy's birthright. I will let the world know I am Countess of Crondace. I am a woman, a mother now, made strong, brave by suffering, and he must do me justice; aye,

even if I spend every penny I possess. I will write to George Osborne at once, and beg of him to assist me in obtaining my legal rights. Lawyers like delay. I feel that I must put the matter to a speedy test, or lose my reason."

"There's a dear, brave lady, worthy daughter of Captain Karson, who died in trying to save one of his own men. Providence sent that villain here, crushed him almost at your very door, and will give you the strength and power to crush him again."

"I should like to see him by himself, to meet him alone, to reason with him, to plead for justice for my boy. He was too much of a coward to own it before that woman. Why, she had power over me from the first, and I did not shake it off until she touched my honour to the quick."

"I wouldn't trust myself alone with him," Betsy protested. "A man that would take away his wife's character would also take her life. Let others deal with him, my dear. You haven't the

strength to undergo such another trouble as you have already undergone."

"No; I must and will see him, Betsy," she said, firmly. "As my husband, it is my duty to give him a chance of repenting ere I proclaim him in the blackest colours before the whole world. I do not wish my son to be ashamed of his father."

Though usually gentle and retiring, Kate, when roused, as she was now thoroughly, could evince a will and resolution no one would dream of her possessing.

Everything was at stake, even to her husband's name, a proud one, and his honour too, if indeed such a man, judged by the past, could be said to have ever had so noble a principle.

Since the time of his leaving her roof he had not written or made any advances in the direction of explaining his inexplicable conduct, which was another proof of his determination to repudiate the marriage contract.

At first she almost felt glad at being freed from such a man, but her boy had to be considered, and she put aside all womanly pains for his sake.

She simply drove to Crondale House, and sent up her card as Mrs. R. Lonsdale.

To her astonishment she was admitted instantly, and shown into the library, where she found the Earl.

"I expected you, Kate," he commenced in a conciliatory tone, placing a chair for her in his wonted courteous fashion.

"You did!" she answered, impulsively, arguing hopefully from these words.

"Yes; it is better that we should understand each other."

"In what way can that end be accomplished? Our present embarrassing position admits of only one solution—justice to me and our child!"

"You are inexperienced in the ways of the world, Kate. Sometimes passion gets the upper hand of prudence, as in our case."

"I will not continue the discussion if you pursue this ambiguous course," she objected, warmly.

"Am I your wife or not?"

"In one sense, yes; but, in the eyes of the law, no!" he answered, stolidly.

"And you dare tell me that!" she exclaimed, a rosy flush dyeing her cheeks. "Where is my marriage certificate? Produce it, and let it speak for itself. I will not permit you to be the only judge in such a vital question as this. Have you no sense of justice—no pity, no remorse, Richard Lonsdale, to thus throw back in my teeth an innocent girl's trust, who, loving you and believing you a noble man, left home, mother, friends, and the love of a good, true, honest man to cast in her lot with you as your wife?"

"Remorse, yes; before Heaven I admit it, Kate. If my life could undo what I have done I would willingly forfeit it."

"Let the proofs speak for themselves. I am here to defend my innocent child from a foul stigma. Surely you do not wish to brand yourself as one of the vilest of men. Has that woman so enthralled, fascinated you, that you forget all honour, and proclaim a peer of the realm to be a villain? Think well of it, Richard, before it is too late, for I tell you that I will fight for my honour's sake to the bitter end!"

"Would you incur the world's scorn, Kate?"

"Scorn! why scorn! I have done no wrong to society. Tell me what you intend doing, and quickly!"

"You are not my wife!"

"Not your wife! Who is, then?"

"No one, as yet."

"Mark me well, my noble Earl. From this moment we are at war. I shall assume the title of Countess of Crondale publicly. It is for you to sue me if I am wrong."

"Kate, don't do anything so mad!"

"I have nothing farther to say to you, except this. I am rich—richer than you can have any conception of—and will carry my case, eye, to the foot of the Throne itself to obtain justice. Your dastardly words have killed the love I felt for you. Oh! how I prayed, interceded with tears,

that you might be spared, when in the silent watches of the night I hung over your couch battling with death's angel for your life, thanking Heaven for having given me the sweet task of being your ministering angel. All the old love came back to me and you. How have you repaid me?"

"For pity's sake cease, Kate. You harrow up my very soul itself."

"Harrow! Why, you do not know what misery and torture I endured when, returning to my humble home, I found my dying mother unable to tell me that I was forgiven. Then came biting poverty; and why did I suffer all this! For your sake—for your sake!"

"Cannot we arrive at a compromise?" he asked, eagerly.

"Yes, in one way, and in one only. You say our marriage was not legal. Let us be married afresh!"

"Impossible!" he said, emphatically.

"I am answered, but not crushed. You will find that the law can reach you, and society thrust you out from its midst as it would a leper. I came here for peace, to give you a chance of redeeming your name and honour, only to find that you esteem both so little as to refuse me justice."

Without waiting for his reply she swept out of the room, leaving him in a state of mind few could envy.

"How lovely she looked," he murmured, "so like her own sweet self, but more beautiful; and yet I cannot wrench from my heart Bertie, my first love, my queenly-imperial sister. To lose her now she is free would be worse than death; and yet I may find that I have forfeited claims from which I cannot free myself."

"He paced the room in a perfect fever of mingled emotions, battling against the still small voice of conscience, and all too successfully, ambition conquering principle and every dictate of honour."

That Kate was wealthy was of no moment to him. She lacked blue blood, and was of the people; while Bertie (his pet name for Lady Ransome) was descended from kings, and would grace his proud position as Earl of Crondale.

That night he tossed and tumbled on his bed of down, which to him seemed a bed of thorns.

But at last he sank into a troubled sleep, in which was re-enacted all that had passed within the eventful last few weeks.

Then a horror fell upon him, for he stood at the brink of a stagnant pool, the wide, black silent water hemmed in by trees, but surrounded by a close ring of dark-coloured earth, uncovered by any greenness of grass or wood; along the brink grew clumps of tall, lank reeds, sighing mournfully as the wind whistled through them like an invisible Pan.

Suddenly he was in the presence of some awful being, who, with long bony finger, pointed to the Stygian blackness, and from out the dark waters arose the face of a human being.

Then came these words:—

"Beware of ambition's lust, of injustice to the living, lest the dead should drag you down to unutterable depths of shame and woe."

With a stifled shriek and a moan he awoke, shivering like one afflicted with palsy, a dank, cold perspiration rolling off his forehead in great beads, as if the vision had harrowed up his very soul, and brought him face to face with his inner self, in all its black deformity.

How he longed for a gleam of the dawn to dispel the awful gloom that seemed to envelop him in a sable shroud!

And although physically brave, yet he would not for a king's ransom have left his bed to strike a light.

It was only a dream, but that awful figure, shapeless as some hideous phantom, intangible as the air, seemed to be at his side still, and ever and anon came that white, upturned face, as if to accuse him of murder, foul and wrong.

At last the welcome silvery dawn streamed through the window, and with it, as from before Chanticleer's proud challenge, fled the spirit of black night.

"Is this a warning?" he thought, as he arose; and staggering like an inebriate, lav'd his face, head, and temples in cold water, as if to wash

out the remembrance of that fearsome vision. "I will do justice. Bertie will help me to right a wrong. She cannot hold me to my promise. Oh! that we had never met only to make each other's lives a misery!"

A few hours later he was waiting in the drawing-room for the woman who had enslaved him, resolute, as he thought, to throw off her yoke, and be free to render justice to Kate.

It was a mighty battle he was fighting, and angels must have wished him victory; but she entered, and at the sight of her—of her matchless beauty and queenly grace, and soft, winning smiles—half his good resolves deserted him, and he was happy—merely because he was in her presence.

A costly morning robe hung round her, its hue rivaling the pink shade in mother-of-pearl; soft lace in profusion peeped from beneath the skirt, where gleamed two tiny satin-slipped feet, whose high arched instep quite ravished his senses.

Everything in the room was in harmony with her magnificent *tout ensemble*, and proclaimed her to be a woman who would shine in the world as a star of the first magnitude, and would strive by every means, both fair and false, to retain her position against all rivalry.

The air, heavy with fragrance distilled by countless flowers and aromatic plants, steeped his senses in a flood of voluptuous delight.

No wonder that this queenly woman, a very Semiramis, dwarfed the lesser light of sweet Kate, who, when contrasted with her, seemed a seraph by the side of a fallen archangel.

"Bertie, dear Bertie! I have come to sue to you for freedom, to say a last good-bye."

"No, no! I cannot, will not, give you up!" she cried, in wailing accents, fringed with despair. "Think of what I suffered in all those years when I was a wife in name but not in heart, of how bravely I kept my wifely vows! And now that I am free, and the cap of bliss at my lips, you, the man I love, wish to dash it away ruthlessly, and why? Because of that doll with the face of a child, soulless, a mere automaton—a something to pet one moment, and be sickened by the next."

Her midnight eyes, unfathomable as that dark pool of his dream, were fixed upon him; and, basilisk-like, held him spell-bound, entranced, and seemed to draw his very will out of him.

"Bertie, I do love you; but oh! how can I escape from the toils which I, in a foolish moment, in an idle hour, wound round me, because I thought you were lost to me for ever, and I was only plain Richard Lonsdale!"

"Be brave; crush her by defiance, contempt, ridicule! Why should she stand between you and me, and a love hallowed by years of separation—of suffering? Is she your wife in reality?"

"Yes!" he said, brokenly.

"Oh, Heavens! what do I hear!" she almost hissed in the intensity of her passion. "But it must not, shall not be; she has dared to cross my path. Let her beware of my anger."

And in a moment her soft rounded arms were clinging round his neck, and her head resting on his breast; while tears of passionate despair rained down from her eyes, as she moaned,—

"Mine, mine—only mine for ever!"

He was startled, alarmed, almost terrified by this outburst, for he could see that here was a nature that when it could not warn and protect, would blight and destroy—a perfect volcano of fierce, ungovernable passion, which had now burst its bonds, and was hurrying them both to possible destruction.

"Bertie, calm yourself! I will not give you up without a struggle," he said, soothingly.

"You dare not!" she said, looking up, suddenly, "together we sink or swim! A love like mine cannot be thwarted. Rather than see her acknowledged as your wife I would plunge a dagger in her heart first, and myself after."

"Come, come, Bertie, my southern Quaker, don't let us dream of anything but love!" he rejoined, coaxingly. "We will find some way of escape from the meshes of this net; let us go abroad, and live only for each other."

In a moment her arms unwound themselves,

and springing to her feet, she stood before him like an outraged empress, exclaiming,—

"No! Only as your wife will I take my place at your side."

"But what if she should discover the truth and the proofs?" he asked, in dire perplexity, for there was no reasoning with her in her present mood.

"Of what use are proofs when she would not be alive!"

"No, no! do not tempt me, Bertie, or yourself, with these wild, unholy imaginings. Be patient, and all yet may be well."

"Patient! As well preach that to the idle winds as to me. Only a few weeks back I thought myself, and was—the happiest of women, and now the veriest wretch in all creation is not so wretched as I. I have men at my feet, but I spurn them all for your sake. And all these years, when my heart was widowed by separation, my one thought was that some day death would sever my hateful bonds; and Heaven, more merciful than man, did give me back my freedom; although I was enveloped in robes of mourning to please society, yet my heart laughed—nay! thrilled with delight; and yet you tell me that I cannot become your wife, and wish me to be what you dared not make her!"

"By Heaven! you wrong me, Bertie. It would be a Paradise to live near you; to see you daily, to know that, in spite of marriage laws, our hearts were wedded. I would not bring the world's scorn upon you, not to ensure my soul's salvation."

"And are you mad enough to picture such a life as that to me? I have wealth, beauty, talents, and would shine as the sun does in the heavens proudly; and not take a position such as you, in your cowardice, would doom me to. No, you will never see me again in life, unless you now decide, once and for ever, between that doll and me!"

"My choice is made, Bertie; you, not she, are the idol of my heart. Come what will, the die is cast; but I counsel prudence, because you and I are standing on the brink of a precipice, over which one false step might precipitate us."

"What then! Love such as ours cannot be quenched by death, but is as undying as the soul itself. Here it exists but a brief span; there it is immortal, eternal; and I would brave a thousand deaths for your sake."

What power had he to quell or conquer such a being as this! And all too late, he saw the terrible consequences of that hasty marriage; the rocks of Scylla on the one side, those of Charybdis on the other, both threatening dire destruction to his hopes; and there was no more miserable man in the world at that moment than the Earl of Crondace.

CHAPTER VII.

POOR Kate, in spite of all her courageous resolves, found that the tension on her nerves was getting too much for her to bear; and, after all, she had a green spot in her heart, for the man she had once devotedly, distractedly loved—the very opposite in nature to Lady Ransome. She loathed the idea of inflicting pain and shame on any human being, however culpable they might be, and this feeling was intensified when punishment was to overtake the father of her boy.

Betsy saw her pining and fretting, as in the days of old at Mill Hill, and longed for the coming of George Osborne, who had been written to.

"Cheer up, dear child!" she used to say, in the hope of rousing Kate from her despondency, but all in vain; for sickness, the result of cruel anxiety, overtook her; and then it became necessary to obtain a housekeeper, for Betsy had her hands full in attending to mother and child.

So an advertisement was inserted in one of the dailies, and by a strange, ordering of fate it fell under the notice of Lady Ransome, who had a vacancy in her household, and was coming over the advertisement sheet.

"Apply to Mrs. Lonsdale!" her ladyship read out. "Why, it is her address! If only I could introduce someone into the position

who would play the part of spy for me, all would be well. I should then know her intentions."

Of a daring nature, the idea once conceived was promptly acted upon; and touching a bell, she directed the servant to send Hester Routh to her.

"You sent for me, my lady!" said a wheedling, soft voice, as Hester Routh entered the room—a fair woman of about thirty, with a smile on her face, but a want of it in the eyes, which had a nasty, stealthy, furtive look about them, as if she were casting about for something to pounce upon.

"Yes, Hester; sit down. I want you to do me a service."

"Your ladyship knows my devotion to you. Am I not happy and honoured in being your foster-sister?"

"I have an enemy, Hester; one who is making my very existence wretched. She is in want of a housekeeper. Could you try for the place?"

"For what purpose, my lady?" was the cautious question.

"To intercept letters, to make copies of them for me; that is all."

"I will undertake to try my best; but what is to be done about my references? I cannot, I presume, apply to you under the circumstances!"

"That can be arranged. Proceed to this address at once," writing it down rapidly. "I think you can obtain the situation—at least you can but try. If you succeed you will be handsomely rewarded. Come to me before you start and the address of a lady will be waiting for you, whom you must say you have been serving for three years."

"There is such a nice quaker-like looking body applying for the situation, my dear!" said Betsy, later on that morning. "She's the best one as yet, if looks go for anything."

"Let me see her," Kate said, listlessly. "I am tired already with seeing so many."

When Hester entered her presence Kate's face lit up for an instant with satisfaction, for she thought she should like the neat, staid, gray-clad woman.

All was arranged very quickly between them pending the reference, which, being satisfactory, Hester Routh entered Kate's service, ostensibly as a housekeeper, but in reality as a snake in the grass.

The new housekeeper won golden opinions, and soon became an especial favourite with Kate.

"No news, and a month elapsed, Hester!" said Lady Ransome, querulously.

"Yes, but I have something at last, my lady. See, here is the correct copy!"

Almost snatching the missive she read,—

"Malta,—

"MY DEAR MRS. LONSDALE—I am not surprised to learn that your husband has turned out a scoundrel. I never credited him with being anything else. My eyes were open while yours were blinded. I shall start for England by the next mail steamer, and will leave no stone unturned to prove your title as his wife, although Heaven knows it would be better for you to find that you were not tied for life to one so heartless, so devoid of all honour. The marriage certificate can no doubt be procured. If he has married you in a false name it will be all the worse for him."

"Ever your earnest friend and well-wisher,

"GEORGE OSBORNE"

"P.S.—I think it would be a good plan for you to wait a little while before assuming the title of countess. From what you have told me you must be on your guard against Lady Ransome, but I will soon be near you to protect and advise you.—G. O."

"Dangerous!" she laughed disdainfully, a steely glitter in her eyes, and a cruel expression about her mouth. "How dangerous he can never guess. The campaign has commenced in earnest at last, and I am glad of it!"

"You are pleased, I see, my lady," Hester ventured to remark.

"Yes, because I know something of her intentions;" and taking out her gold-and-pearl portemonnaie, she gave the spy some gold, saying, "This is only an earnest of my future intentions!"

Meanwhile poor Kate became worse, and was under the doctor's hands, who advised her to go abroad for change of air and scene, as her disorder was of a nervous character principally.

She only shook her head, and said plaintively,—

"Business of importance will chain me here for months, perhaps. I fancy rest and quiet for a week or two will help me to get about again."

But despite all the efforts of a really clever physician she seemed to lose strength daily and to pine away, fading like a withered flower.

"Hst, come quietly, the household are all gone upstairs to their rooms; but Mrs. Batten is as sharp as a farret," whispered Hester under her breath, as she led Lady Ransome to her room in the pitch darkness.

"Is she very ill, Hester?" her ladyship asked, eagerly, with an unusual pallor in her face.

"Yes, very."

"Perhaps she will die!" she rejoined, huskily.

"I hope not, for she is very gentle and kind, even to me who has been her foe."

"You must let me go to her room. Hester, I want to find some papers of vital consequence to me. You say she keeps her writing-desk beside her bed!"

"Cannot I get them for you! It would be risky of you to attempt anything so dangerous yourself."

"Nonsense! I know best. Besides, I dare not divulge to you what the papers are. They concern one who is dear to me. Is she very weak?"

"No! I think you will find her asleep, my lady; but I do not like this business at all. She might recognise you, or give an alarm; and then all would be lost, and what would become of me?"

"I can and will protect you, Hester. There is nothing to be nervous about. I shall be as noiseless as any ghost; and, if she awakes, I can easily escape. Sick people, you know, have strange fancies, and if she mentions the matter you can easily persuade her she was mistaken."

Hester, seemingly convinced, showed her to the door of Kate's chamber, where she left her with a shudder which she could not repress.

Like a spirit of evil she glided forward into the dimly-lighted room, a look of exultant hate on her face, whose deadly pallor was heightened by her ghastly black robes, unrelieved by a single gleam of colour.

She looked keenly at Kate, who lay on her side sleeping quietly—her golden hair falling in waves on the snowy pillow—a perfect picture of innocent repose—little dreaming of the serpent that had invaded the spot with deadly intent.

"She will sleep more quietly presently!" Lady Ransome muttered; "the drug will escape detection. It is sure and deadly in its work. It is her life or mine. I fight for love, and will not be balked. She was a fool to pit her puny strength against mine!"

She seemed like a black avenging spirit as she stood there, listening with bated breath for any sound that might break upon the awful stillness that reigned in the house, where all was as silent as the grave.

Swiftly she took from her pocket a small phial, and, uncorking the medicine-bottle that stood on a side-table, she poured a few drops into it, and then carefully replaced the cork.

Poor Kate! No one is at hand to save you from this woman's jealous hate. The poison is deadly potent; it was distilled in Italy—that land where the art of secret poisoning is so well understood.

But some one, like an angel of mercy, glides into the room; and, before Lady Ransome is aware of it, her wrist is gripped; and standing there is Hester Routh, her face ghastly with horror.

"Come, you have deceived me!" she whispered, hoarsely. "Would you commit murder?"

Trembling in every limb the wretched woman permitted Hester to lead her out.

"What was that you put into the medicine?" Hester asked, resolutely.

"Let me go. I could kill you, you spy," she hissed, as, wrenching herself free, she sped along the hall, and let herself out of the house.

Dazed, terrified, Hester made her way back to Kate's room and stood transfixed with horror, for her mistress had awakened, and was about to drink the fatal draught.

"Don't!" Hester almost shrieked, and, startled by her voice, Kate let the glass fall to the floor, where it crashed into splinters.

"What is the matter?" she asked tremulously.

"Nothing, madame; I walked in my sleep, I suppose, and woke up all of a sudden. I hope I have not frightened you!"

"Just a little; but what is worse, I have lost my sleeping draught."

"Heaven be thanked for that!" was the silent answer of Hester Routh.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE Earl of Crounce wishes to see me!" faltered Kate, when Betsy entered with his card, with a hard expression on her honest face.

"Yes, dear; it's some more villainy, I suppose. Take my advice; don't see him, child."

"I must. Oh, yes! for my boy's sake!" she pleaded, weakly rising on her elbow, and gazing pitifully up into the old lady's face.

The Earl started with almost remorse as his eyes rested on her; so fragile, so delicate, and yet so lovely, in her very weakness; the white wrapper that enveloped her slender form scarcely veiling with her lily-like complexion, heightened by a hectic flush that matched the flow of rose-coloured ribbon that confined her gown.

"Have you come to see the wreck you have made me?" she asked, half scornfully.

"No, Kate. I am sorry you are ill; very sorry. I have come here of my own accord to make reparation for the past."

"You have!" she panted, a delicious thrill vibrating through her heart. "Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!"

"Kate, I am not worthy of your love; forget me. Let our lives be sundered," he said, earnestly.

"You are mocking me, sir; is this your reparation?"

"Listen to me, Kate. I will leave a document acknowledging your son to be my rightful heir."

"How can that be unless I, his mother, am your wife?" she asked, indignantly.

"Why do you not meet me half way? Would you force me into an unlovable life when I offer you your freedom, and your son an Earldom? Surely, your revenge is not of a character to refuse such conditions!"

"Do not mistake my motives. My heart is dead to all love for you; only a miracle could revive it. But I owe something, everything to myself—my womanly honour, my fair name—over which your machinations seek to cast a vile blot. Would you make barter of all I hold most dear, as if it were so much merchandise? My son does not need your permission to inherit what is his by right already. And now shall I tell you what all this means! That woman has sent you here to make these insulting proposals to me."

"No, you wrong her there, Kate. Perhaps, if you knew the true story of her life you would pity instead of condemn her. Years ago, when she and I were boy and girl, we fell in love, and that love grew with our growth, until at last we lived only for each other; but I was poor then, and her parents forced her to marry a man thirty years older than herself. For ten long years she was a good wife to that man, and I can tell you truthfully that she and I never met all that time. His death released her just about the time you and I threw in our lot together."

"You sought me, and by specious arguments and an assumption of love won my heart. Has she any pity for me, knowing what I am to you? Why does she not give you up? The world is large enough for her to select from! I do not know why I argue with you, except it is to bring you to see how cruelly you have treated me. You ask me for freedom. Why? To put another woman in my place; to give her a title which belongs, by your own admission, to me. If she were in my place would she accede to such humiliating conditions? No! And you know it! But you think, because my birth is not as noble as hers, that I must be sacrificed. There is the door, sir. Go, and never enter it again unless you come to offer me a humble apology for all your baseness and insults."

"You defy me, then?" he asked, white with rage at finding himself foiled, where he was assured of an easy victory.

"Defy! why should I? I only claim justice, and will have it at any cost to you or me. I have one faithful friend left, who will stand by me in good or evil report; one, too, I deeply wronged, but whose noble heart has forgiven me."

"Your old lover, I presume?" he sneered; "a mere yeoman."

"Yeoman or not, he would die, rather than betray a woman's honour. The day may come when you would be glad if he permitted you to call him your friend. I have waited patiently, thinking you would see your folly, but that woman's wiles has cast a glamour over you, and you are blind to consequences."

"You may yet repent your refusal," he said, savagely. "I shall not renew my offer."

"Nor do I wish it; it is idle to talk of peace when there is war in the heart. Go, leave me! I am ill, heart-broken, but not conquered," and she sank back on her pillows with a weary little sigh, and closed those soft grey eyes in very pain, both mental and physical.

But even he was not so black as he painted himself; for that sigh touched his heart, and bending over her, he kissed her hand tenderly, almost reverently, and then rushed from the spot, a prey to keen remorse.

In his blind haste he nearly stumbled against Betsy, who carried little Warren in her arms, intent upon showing him to his heartless father.

"Don't be ashamed of your own flesh and blood, if you are an earl!" she said, stoutly, as she held the boy up towards him. "He's as beautiful as a cherubim, and you ought to feel proud of him!"

Taking the little fellow in his arms, who smiled up into his face trustfully, he kissed him thrice, and murmured,—

"Heaven bless you, dear one! May you live to be a comfort to your mother!" and in reply, as if it knew what he said, the child cooed with pleasure, and patted his face with his dimpled finger.

"Well, I never! Fancy him kissing baby like that, and saying such nice words! Perhaps, after all, they'll make it up, and I'll live to see them happy together. I pray for that every day and night."

Elated with triumph at the success of her manoeuvre, Betsy hastened to tell her mistress the joyous tidings.

"Kissed my darling?" she said, wistfully. "It is the first time, perhaps the last; but I am thankful he has seen him. It may soften his obdurate heart, and help him to fight against the spells of that pitiless woman!"

CHAPTER IX.

KATE soon began to discover that some secret enemy was at work; stabbing her, as it were, in the dark, for all her acquaintances fell away from her; and rumours reached her that some scandal had been set afloat against her character.

To combat with these slanders was not in her power; and she rejoiced when George Osborne, whom she had treated so cruelly, arrived on the scene.

"Why, Kate, how ill you are looking! This trouble is killing you by inches," he said, sadly.

"I shall be better presently, George," she answered, trying to appear cheerful, and forcing back the tears that would well into her gentle eyes.

"Have you done anything with regard to proofs, yet?" he asked, taking her boy on his knee and caressing him.

"No, you see I am so helpless; but now you are here I am ready for anything!"

"Have you seen him since his accident?"

"Yes, only a few days ago he called upon me, and made proposals which I would not accede to."

"Have I your permission to call upon him?" he asked, eagerly. "I might succeed where you, a loving, trusting woman, have failed!"

"I fear you might quarrel with him, George. That of all things must be avoided."

"I fail to see why we should. As your representative, I should simply ask for an explanation of his extraordinary conduct before appealing to the law."

"He has already explained," she said, with a sigh. "He loves another, and wishes me to sacrifice myself, my name, my honour, my all!"

"Is the man mad? Does he realise the consequences to himself?"

"Yes, he went so far even as to propose that he should acknowledge my child to be his rightful heir!"

"Why, that is an admission in itself that you are his wife. He must be insane, Kate, although I admit there is a method in his madness. Now, don't be angry if I ask you one question. Do you still love him?"

"Is it possible that I can forget he is the father of my boy, my husband! Sometimes I hate him; at others the old affection pleads for him. He kissed Warren, and spoke kindly of me when he was here last. I have a double duty to perform; to see myself righted, and to save him from the tolls of that woman, who even now is plotting to crown me with shame and dishonour."

"My poor Kate!" he said, brokenly. "Heaven forbid that any words of mine should make your cross too heavy to bear. I have come to help you, and I can best do so by seeing him in person. Even now he might relent, and save this unpleasant matter from being dragged before the public."

"I will leave it all in your hands; but, for my sake, avoid any quarrel with him. He is a man who, his passion once aroused, becomes desperate, reckless!"

"Have no fear. I go simply as your ambassador, and not to avenge any private wrong of my own."

Betsy now entered to take Master Warren away to the nursery, and her kindly face lit up with smiles at Osborne's affectionate greeting.

"I was afraid, Master George, that you would scold me for not taking proper care of her," she remarked. "It is all his doing, not mine. I despise him. Why, for' bless me, if I was a man I'd go through fire and water to save Miss Kate from even a finger ache; but it will all come home to him some day—mark my words it will."

And to cover her emotion she took the child hastily out of his arms, and beat a hurried retreat.

"I decline to discuss this delicate family affair with a stranger, sir," the Earl said, haughtily.

"I am not a stranger, but an old and valued friend of your wife, my lord," George Osborne said, firmly. "She has no living relative to champion her cause. Surely she has suffered enough already! Her disobedience broke her mother's heart, and your desertion of her at a critical time has quite broken down her health. I look upon her as my sister; we were boy and girl together. Until you came on the scene I had every hope of making her my honoured wife."

"Enough of this twaddle," the Earl sneered, anger flaming into his dark face. "Miss Karen

is quite at liberty to marry you to-morrow if she chooses."

"She is too honourable to commit bigamy, my lord," Osborne retorted, passion gradually overcoming prudence.

"You seem to know a great deal of the lady's intentions. Since when did you commence the rôle of carpet knight? I should have thought the plough and harrow would have suited you better."

Osborne winced, and bit his lips at this implied insult, and a greyiness stole over his honest face.

"My lord, I promised your wife to keep my temper, and my promise is my bond; but you are trying me too far. Would you have her utterly defenceless, and at your mercy? How can she trust you after what has happened? Her father was a gentleman by birth and education—she is your equal."

"Insolent clown!" cried the Earl. But the words had scarcely left his lips than Osborne, enraged past endurance, felled him with a blow straight from the shoulder, saying, savagely,—

"You dastard! you betrayer of innocent women! You have to deal with a man now—an Englishman—who takes an insult from no one, not even from a peer!"

Rising with an awful scowl, the Earl rushed to the door, and was about to lock it, with murderous intent, fully resolved that neither he himself nor his assailant should leave the room alive until the insult was wiped out, when on the threshold he met Lady Ransome face to face.

"What is the meaning of this, Crondace?" she asked in alarm.

"Meaning! Simply that this fellow has dared to strike me in my own house! A pretty agent for the would-be Countess of Crondace to send to plead her cause!"

"What else could you expect from such a person!" saying Osborne disdainfully.

"At all events, madam, such people as I do not wish to break a solemn engagement, or to trample on a defenceless woman! I am ready to answer for what I have done either here or before a court of law. I came here with the very best intentions, I leave, telling you that I will use every effort to checkmate a vile conspiracy by obtaining proofs of the marriage. You wish for war, and war it shall be!"

With head erect, and eyes flashing with scorn upon the pair, George Osborne left the house literally shaking the dust off his feet as a testimony against them.

"Now, Crondace, are you convinced of the fatal mistake you made in connecting yourself with that woman and her low-bred set?"

"That blow burns into my flesh like a red-hot iron—only blood can wipe it out!"

"Crondace, you forget that any ruffian can insult a lady or gentleman; so can a horse or any animal kick, bite, or slay without it being thought an extraordinary occurrence. Treat the fellow as you would a mere brute. You would be unwise to look upon it as you would a blow dealt by an equal. Contempt is the best weapon with which to attack such canaille."

At this juncture the footman knocked at the door and said,—

"My lady, a person named Hester Routh wishes to see you on important business."

"Me!" she faltered in dismay, with a guilty conscience making her a coward. "Tell her I am particularly engaged."

"It matters not, my lady. I am here, and must speak with you," cried Hester, forcing her way past the man.

"How dare you presume to follow and intrude here!" Lady Ransome demanded angrily.

"If I cannot see you privately I must see you where I can. I am suspected of—"

"Crondace, kindly leave me alone with this person," Lady Ransome interposed hastily. "I regret she should have had the audacity to seek an interview with me in your house."

He assented with a bow, and when mistress and servant were alone, the former clenching Hester by the wrist, said,—

"What is the meaning of this—are you mad?"

"Yes! with terror. You ought to be the last to speak unkindly to me. One word would ruin you, Lady Ransome. Let me go: I am not to be trifled with."

"What has happened?" her ladyship asked, obeying Hester's command. "Is that woman dead?"

"No! but the poison you put in the medicine has been found out, and suspicion falls upon me."

"Impossible!" she gasped, tottering to a chair.

"I thought all was safe when she dropped the glass, but it appears that she had not poured out all the draught. What remained was mixed up with a fresh supply; and, although it has not killed her, she is very ill. She saw me on that awful night after you had gone."

"Had she died what would you have done?"

"Denounced you!" she said, with fierce energy. "I am not going to be branded as a murderess to please you. My character is ruined as it is. The matter will be placed in the hands of the police, and they will find out that I was last in your service, and that my references were false. What is to be done?"

"Let me think!" her ladyship pleaded, pale to the very lips at the awful consequences which stared her so ruthlessly in the face.

Then, after a pause, during which the dropping of a pin might be heard, she said,—

"Hester, you must leave England as quickly as possible. Meet me within the hour at St. Pancras Station, when I will give you a sum of money. You must do this for your own sake as well as mine. Don't hesitate, or you are lost!"

When Hester had gone, Lady Ransome said, by way of explanation to the Earl,—

"It was only one of my maids, who is a little flighty in her head. I am sorry if she has caused you any annoyance."

That night Hester Routh bid good-bye to England, and started for America, bearing in her bosom a weighty secret; and once more Kate's rival was left in possession of the field to plot and plan against her.

Hester's statement about the poisoned draught was too true. Owing to neglect on the part of some one in the chemist's employ the phial was not washed out, hence the almost catastrophe.

CHAPTER X.

"DETECTIVE PRATT, from Scotland Yard!" gasped Lady Ransome; a ghastly hue stealing into her face.

"I will see this man, Bertie!" exclaimed the Earl, who was seated, reading the morning paper.

"No, no!" she cried in terror, and trying to rise.

"I say yes!" he persisted, in a firm tone that brooked no refusal, adding,—

"There is nothing to be alarmed at, my dear Bertie. I expect it is only some trivial business connected with one of your servants."

Turning to the man he said, "Show Mr. Pratt in here."

"I say no!" she almost shouted, "I cannot, will not, see this person."

But before her command could be obeyed Inspector Pratt was at the door, and, without leave even, entered the room. There was nothing in his appearance to cause alarm to any one, for his was a good-humoured, smiling face.

"I beg your pardon, sir, and yours, my lady; but mine is business which is rather important. I have ascertained that a young woman, by name Hester Routh, was in your service for some years."

"What has that to do with me?" she said, acidly, regaining a portion of her usual composure.

"I beg your pardon, my lady; but she is wanted on a serious charge—one of attempted murder!"

"I fail to see what Lady Ransome has to do with the actions of her late servant," the Earl interposed, somewhat haughtily.

"That's what I'm coming to, sir!" the inspector said, unabashed. "Is this your handkerchief, my lady?" holding up a piece of delicate cambric with her crest and initials embroidered in one of the corners.

"Yes," she said, carelessly, "and was no doubt pilfered by her."

"Excuse me, Lady Ransome; but are you acquainted with Mrs. Lonsdale, of Kensington?"

It was the Earl's turn to start now. This was a revelation to him, and it flashed through his mind that Hester Routh was the woman who had interrupted her ladyship and him by her unwarrantable intrusion.

"I called there once, and once only," was the guarded reply, "during the illness of my friend, the Earl of Crondace, this gentleman," motioning towards him.

"Have you any idea of Hester Routh's whereabouts, my lady?"

"No; how should I?" she answered. "Servants come and go without exciting anything but a passing interest in the minds of their employers."

"Who has been poisoned?" the Earl asked, uneasily.

"Mrs. Lonsdale, my lord!"

"Has she any suspicious herself?" he pursued.

"None, my lord! But I have; and that woman must be found. She has eluded us up to now, but we hope to soon track her down. Mrs. Lonsdale has offered a reward of two hundred pounds for her apprehension!"

The statute officer kept back one important fact, which was that Kate really suspected Lady Ransome; but, of course, this was *entre nous*, and he was too prudent to show his hand to a possible adversary.

"This is a mysterious affair," remarked the Earl. "What motive could a mere servant have to attempt to poison her mistress?"

"It may turn out that she was an accomplice of someone else, my lord!" the inspector remarked, turning his face from her ladyship, whose eyes were bent on him as if to read his very soul.

"Have you any clue to that fact?" put in his lordship.

"We hope to very shortly unravel the whole skein," the officer said quietly. "We thought, perhaps, her ladyship might have assisted us in our inquiries, or I should not have troubled you. There is one more question, my lady, I would like to be enlightened on. When did Hester Routh leave your service?"

"Really my memory is very bad for dates," she protested, nervously.

"I can inform you, my lady. It was on the third of October last; and she entered into Mrs. Lonsdale's service on that same date with a character from another lady."

"What if she did!" she asked, with asperity, throwing down the gauntlet of defiance at her tormenter.

"Simply, my lady, that it strengthens certain suspicions. But I will retire, with thanks for your assistance so far!" this with a significant irony in his well-trained voice which did not escape the Earl, and caused Lady Ransome to bite her lips to hide her emotion.

Scarcely had the firm tread of the police officer died away when the Earl burst out vehemently—

"Lady Ransome, you are that woman's accomplice!"

"How dare you make such a vile accusation!" she demanded, angrily.

"Because it is true, and you know it, or why did that wretched woman dare to follow you to my house the other day? I warned you against such insane folly as this. Should that infamous woman be arrested, she will turn queen's evidence, and as well as you will be dragged into the question. I must say that appearances would be very black against us."

"Is this the way you repay my devotion!" she asked reproachfully. "Why are you ready to believe me guilty on mere suspicion? Doctors and chemists have made fatal mistakes before to-day."

"Then why has Hester Routh absconded!" he asked, piteously.

"Because, being weak-nerved, she dreaded even suspicion, and took to flight; besides, I believe Mrs. Lonsdale guilty of any meanness against you or me. Why should she not have put the poison into the draught herself? If I had done so, she would not now be alive to tell the tale. She hates you, and fears and detests me. What more likely than she should try to strike us down with the same blow?"

"I dare not believe her guilty of such infamy," he protested, warmly.

"And yet you accuse me openly of a crime you think her incapable of. Truly, you are gallant, chivalrous to one whose only fault has been that she loved you too well."

"I am distracted," he cried, pacing the room. "What is to be done? Must your name and mine be dragged before the world? By Heaven! I would rather die by my own hand!"

"I am only a weak woman, and yet I am heavier than you, Crondace. Let us wait; Hester Routh may never be found. They would not dare, even though they are vindictive, to charge me with such an act simply because she obtained, for reasons of her own, a character from some one else."

"Which must have been a written one," he suggested wearily.

"Of course," she assented, off her guard for the moment.

"Then you were a party to the plot, and for what purpose?"

Perceiving it was useless to fence with him further, she made a virtue of necessity, and said—

"I but only wanted her as a spy, nothing farther."

"I am very sorry to hear this. You ought to have consulted me first. How is it possible to fight our battle with such weapons as espionage and murder, when at the first alarm discovery and detection follow instantly? It is mere reckless folly, and invites defeat, dishonour, disgrace!"

"These are hard words, Crondace!"

But true, too true. Heaven send us safely out of this gross, fatal mistake of yours. I may have wronged her, but would not injure a hair of her head, even to gain you. Do you understand me, Bertie?"

"Yes, oh, yes! You speak very plainly, Crondace. Your love is cool, calculating; mine is a torrent, sweeping every obstacle out of its path, crushing when defied; hoping against hope, ready to do, to dare—to die."

He shuddered visibly as he looked at that face, beautiful even in its demonic expression, and repented him that he had raised up such a Nemesis as her.

"Good-bye, Bertie! I'm off!"

"Where?" she asked, plaintively. "Why say that terrible word, 'Good-bye'?"

"Because I am sick of town," he answered, moodily.

"And you would leave me here alone?"

"Yes, for a time. Take my advice; quit England. Abroad you may reflect upon the folly that has nearly wrecked our lives."

"Then you will not do battle with her, but give in like a beaten ear, and acknowledge her as your wife?" she cried, furious with rage and jealousy.

"I did not say that. While we are together we act as flint to steel. I have no wish to figure as a criminal."

"Howard! poltroon!" she hissed, savagely, when he had left her. "It was for you I passed sleepless nights and wretched days; but I will not be trampled upon. If I cannot be your wife she shall not have that honour. I would kill her first!"

Oh, jealousy! what art thou! The passion which curdles the milk of human kindness within the heart; that changes the pure and wholesome blood to gall; and like the deadly yew tree, scatters desolation where nature had designed the sweetest flowers to bloom.

For two whole days a storm raged through many parts of England.

In London, the parks and squares were strewn with dismembered limbs of the very finest old

trees. Roofs of houses were lifted like a hat from a man's head; tiles ripped up, and chimneys blown flat, so that the air was fairly thick with bricks and slates, and a good deal of mortar.

A lull came at last, followed by a wondrous transformation of the land.

The roads were glazed like porcelain; the rugged fences were lined with icy enamel, the windows veined like alabaster; every sprinklet of grass was bending beneath the weight of a pendant diamond; and the parks were gloriously decked in all the white witchery of frost-spun lace, such as the looms of Brussels and Mechlin could never hope to rival.

Even the sky was full of delicate pendillings as the bleak sun came in flashes through the curling clouds, and softly outlined them one against the other.

It was about this time that Kate received a letter from George Osborne, with the cheering news that after weeks of research he had obtained proofs of the legality of her marriage, and would be on his way home with them on the following day.

"Of what use are proofs!" she thought, sadly, "when I have never held his love. If it were not for my boy I would willingly go away to some far distant land, and forget the mad dream of my girlhood's days. How noble George is to battle in my behalf, and to discover that which crushes his hopes for ever!"

But on the following day she received a telegram, telling her that Osborne had been seriously injured in a railway collision, and was lying at a village called Burnt Oak, close to Chester.

"Why this is more than cruel!" she wailed; "just as victory has crowned his efforts. I must go to him at once. Is this a coincidence or what?—that he should be lying close to my husband's estate, and he is there now, for it is announced in the *Morning Post*. Now, Richard Lonsdale, you will be brought face to face with stern facts! I will compel you to acknowledge me, and then part for ever!"

A fierce exultation had taken possession of her, and she longed to humble the proud and haughty Lady Ransome—to crush her beneath her contempt and ridicule.

Being a woman she acted impulsively, rashly, in writing the following letter to her rival:—

"LADY RANSOME.—The time has come at last when I shall compel you to cease all pretensions to the love of my husband, Earl of Crondace. The proofs of the legality of my marriage are forthcoming and will be in my possession to-morrow at the latest. I am off now to my husband in Cheshire. If you wish to be convinced you can follow me there."

"KATE, COUNTESS OF CRONDACE!"

"She dares to taunt and deride me—she, a woman of the people, to defy me! I will be there, but only to triumph or to die!"

Of the many unwise things Kate had been guilty of, this was the worst. It was teasing a deadly reptile, calling down fire from the clouds, inviting a torrent to pursue you, an avalanche to overwhelm you.

She had brooded over her supposed wrongs for years, and nursed an impassioned love for the Earl in secret during many weary, hopeless years. At last this terrible reality confronted her, and unblessed her mind, and drove her mad.

Kate's imprudent letter, following so closely on the Earl's accusations and reproaches, was the last proverbial straw; and if murder had taken possession of any human being it had of Lady Ransome, who lost no time in taking up Kate's gauge of battle by following her to the spot indicated by her letter.

Kate had also written to the Earl, telling him of the proofs, and of her journey to Burnt Oak.

Little did she dream that within the compass of twenty-four hours events would happen to dwarf others that had gone before in her life of vicissitudes. Whether for good or evil the die was cast, and some of the actors in this strange drama of human actions and motives were to meet in one of those struggles which sometimes

not only decide the destinies of nations, but also of individuals.

Three persons were near the Cottage where George Osborne lay with a broken limb, as if impelled there by the hand of destiny.

Kate had bidden him good-night, promising to see him the next morning, and was making her way to the hotel where she was staying. The road led by a black, silent expanse of water, hemmed in by trees, but surrounded by a close rim of dark-coloured earth, uncovered by any greenness of grass or weed.

Along the brink grew clumps of tall, dark reeds, sighing mournfully as the piercing wind blew between them.

Suddenly she was confronted by a tall figure clad in black from head to foot.

One glance at her face in the gathering twilight revealed her identity. It was Lady Ransome!

"You bade me follow you here. You see I have obeyed you!" she said, in a portentous whisper, full of venom, hatred, and all uncharitableness.

"I will speak to you to-morrow, Lady Ransome!" returned Kate, idly.

"Have you seen the Earl?"

"No, not yet; to-morrow I will."

"To-morrow never comes! Do you think that I who have loved him for years will willingly resign him to you?"

"Let me pass!" This, as the maddened woman caught her by the wrist with a grip of iron.

"Renounce him!" she hissed, her eyes glowing like bright coals, her whole frame quivering with the madness of jealousy which poured through her veins like molten lava.

"Let me go, woman. Would you murder me?"

"Yes, destroy you! crush you and your lying proofs out of my path!"

"Help! help!" shrieked Kate, three distinct times.

A bright flash, and then some dark object bounded forward. Kate was thrust aside, and the steel fell upon the Earl of Crondace, who was on his way to the cottage to see Kate, and arrived at the spot just in time to respond to her cries for help.

"Bertie, what have you done!" he asked, reproachfully, as the warm blood oozed from the wound. "You have killed me!"

"No, no, Crondace! my life for yours," she wailed. "See, they come to separate us!"

as the sound of hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer. "See, there is a nice quiet place down in the waters where we can find rest!"

"Oh, Heaven!" he ejaculated, in a frenzy of horror; "this is the spot I saw in my dream. Bertie! good-bye, I am dying."

"Back!" shouted the mad woman, as, with unnatural strength, she lifted the dying man in her arms; and, with a shriek of defiant, mocking laughter, plunged with him beneath the black, silent waters, which closed over them like a dark shroud.

Kate was found insensible, and taken to the cottage hard by, where the news of the terrible tragedy soon spread, and thrilled everyone with a nameless horror.

On the morrow the bodies were found, and interred in due course side by side in the quiet little old churchyard.

They had loved each other in life, and in death were not separated.

The proofs were sufficient to establish the rights of Kate and her son, little Warren.

It was many a day ere a smile came into her wan face; but time, that healer of heart-wounds, brought her peace at last as the wife of the noble-hearted George Osborne.

[THE END.]

THE great nutritive powers of chocolate are now so generally recognised that it has been adopted for campaign use in the armies and navies of almost every European Government. The increased consumption in Europe within four years is 35 per cent.

WILLIE'S PAINT-BOX.

—30—

"PAPA! papa!" cried Willie Morton, loudly, as he hastened to catch his omnibus. "won't you bring me a nice paint-box and a brush! You know I long to paint and draw, and the old one is all used up."

"I'll see about it," hastily replied his papa, as he hastened to catch his omnibus.

"Oh, Belle!" exclaimed Willie, as he skipped up the front steps, calling to his little sister, who was in the hall, "papa is going to bring me a new paint-box and a brush, and I will paint you a dog and a cat, and lots of pretty things. I can colour some of the pictures in your new book, if mamma will let me do it. I know I can make them a great deal prettier than they are now. I'll make the dogs brown and white, like old Rover, and the cats maltese-colour, like your Misset; and I'll paint the little girls all pink and white and blue, and dress up the boys just like me. Won't it be jolly fun!"

And Willie danced and pranced about so wildly that his mamma came downstairs to learn what made her child so joyous.

"Oh, mamma, mamma!" screamed both children together. "What do you think papa is going to buy us! A paint-box, and we are so happy we have to dance and sing."

"Bring you a paint-box!" said Mrs. Morton. "Are you sure that he will remember it?" for she knew from long experience that her husband's memory was rarely to be depended upon, and that he often promised to do many things which he never thought of performing.

"Oh, yes!" cried Willie. "He said, 'I'll see about it,' and I know he will bring it this evening, and I shall be at the door to meet him."

"Don't set your heart too much upon the paint-box," replied his mamma, "because your father has many things to occupy his mind, and very likely will not think of it again. You must learn, my dear, the maxim, 'Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.'"

But Willie could not be expected to heed this did-time proverb; and the hours of the day dragged wearily, while his usual amusements found little value in his eyes. The express train that he used to load with blocks, and draw up to Belle's house—which he had built of sticks in one corner of the garden—and to unload with great delight, as barrels of flour and sugar, or boxes of tea and other provisions, stood neglected, and he watched both the sun and the clock on their daily rounds, wondering impatiently if half-past five would ever come.

In the afternoon his aunt Emily called in, and he related to her, with glistening eyes and rosy cheeks, his wonderful expectations, saying—

"Just think, Aunt Emily, papa is going to bring me a paint-box and a brush, and I am so happy that I can hardly wait for them to come. And I'll paint you a picture to hang in your own room. I'll paint dogs and cats, for you love them, you know; or else I'll paint little children, like Belle and me. Which should you like the best?" and Willie jumped up and down in the highest glee, and would gladly have stood upon his head, had not his mamma objected seriously to such gymnastics.

Aunt Emily expressed great sympathy in his joy at the anticipation of the new treasure, and said—

"Either picture would be charming, Willie. And if you and Belle will bring your hats we will walk down to a print-shop and buy a print of some little children, with a dog and cat, for you to colour for me."

So the happy children were soon walking down the street, skipping with glee at the thought of the enjoyment they would receive at the print-shop, and thinking of what pleasures the paint-box had in store for them.

The size of the box, and the numbers and colours of the paints, were also duly discussed; and Willie's ideas of dimensions were found to be so extravagant that Aunt Emily was forced to diminish them nearly three-quarters; but she did not detract anything from the boy's exuberant spirits.

As the omnibuses passed only in the evening Willie watched their coming most carefully, for he felt certain that his papa might arrive an hour or two earlier on account of the importance of his errand; and when Aunt Emily had told him that it was surely a vain hope, and that papa could not come until the usual hour, he cried—

"Why, Auntie, I know he will, for when Uncle James came home from America he came down with him at three o'clock, you know, and my paint-box is quite as important as Uncle James' coming."

At this sally Aunt Emily could not help laughing, which rather discomfited Willie, for, like many other children, he did not like to be laughed at, and it made him quiet for the space of three minutes; but little Belle filled up the interlude with expressions of her joy, and calculations of the wonders which her brother would perform with the much-desired paints.

The print-shop offered pleasing attractions for the children, and half an hour soon passed away while the prints were looked over, and the most suitable ones chosen.

It now lacked but half an hour of the long-expected time when Mr. Morton would return from the city, and as soon as they arrived at the gate Willie said—

"Now, Auntie, I'll stay here and watch for that omnibus; and, if you please, you can carry in the pictures, and show them to mamma. You are good to buy them, and I'll make them just as pretty as I can. I think, though, I'll practice on some of our torn picture-books first, so that I can do them extra fine. Won't grandmother think I am a clever boy to make such pretty things?"

And he danced delightedly up and down the pavement, which greatly amused several passers-by.

So Aunt Emily, with little Belle, sought her sister's room, and displayed her purchases.

"You are very good, Emmie," said her sister, "to take so much trouble to please the children, but I really fear that Willie will be sadly disappointed, and scream, and that will displease his papa, you know. My husband has a very poor memory, and often forgets the commissions I give him. The phrase, 'I'll see about it,' means to my ear, 'I'll take no thought of it.' I tried to convince Willie this morning that there was little hope of his obtaining the paint-box; but he is of so sanguine a temperament that it produced no effect upon him."

"Ah, well," answered her sister, "perhaps on this occasion Dick may remember. He is very fond of Willie; and he is such an attractive, handsome child, that every one notices him. His head is noble, and his eye most accurate and discriminating. He selected all these prints, and they were the prettiest in the shop. Our little lad may be a great painter one of these days. Stranger things have happened."

She was interrupted by hearing Willie shout—

"Papa is coming! papa is coming! I see the omnibus."

And, looking out of the window, they saw him rushing up the street to meet him.

His mamma and aunt, feeling interested in the paint-box, hastened downstairs, while little Belle was already at the front door.

"Where is my paint-box, papa! Please give me my paint-box, papa!" cried Willie, as he grasped his papa's hand, and jumped up and down in the excitement of the moment.

"Your paint-box, Willie!" replied his papa. "What do you mean? I haven't any paint-box."

"Why, papa," gasped out the boy, "you promised to buy me one; and Aunt Emily has bought me lots of pictures to paint, and I haven't thought of anything else all day long," and the child burst into tears.

"What a horrid noise that child does make!" exclaimed Mr. Morton. "I never promised to bring him a paint-box."

"Oh, yes you did, papa! You said 'I'll see about it,' and that is just the same!" sobbed Willie.

"No, indeed," replied his papa. "I did not

say I would buy you one; and I never gave it to another thought."

And Mr. Morton shrugged his shoulders at the sound of the boy's shrill cries, and with an air of indifference for his child's grief walked out into the garden at the back of the house, and began to gather pears from his favourite tree.

Willie threw himself upon the carpet of the sitting-room, and his whole frame shook with the agony of his grief, while his cries resounded through the house.

Belle also added her quota to the noise. In vain did their mamma and aunt strive to comfort them.

At length Mr. Morton returned from the garden, and said in notes of stern command—

"Stop that crying at once, children!" Then turning to his wife, he said, "I'd rather be in a bear-garden than in such a den as this! I come home from the city weary and exhausted with my day's work, and this is the comforting scene to which I am treated! It does seem, Mrs. Morton, as if you could have better discipline in your family! These children are enough to make a man insane!" And he caught up his hat, and going towards the door, cried out—

"You need not wait tea for me. I shall spend the evening in more agreeable society."

Mrs. Morton's face turned ashy pale, for she knew too well what society he would seek at the billiard-table, and in what a state he would return home late at night, with his pockets emptied by the amusements in which he had been engaged. She sighed heavily as she lifted Willie from the floor—parting the matted hair which covered his brow, and kissing his disfigured cheeks, as she said, in low coaxing tones—

"Willie is not mamma's darling when he cannot bear disappointment better than this, and makes papa leave us because he cannot endure to hear his screams."

"But he said he would see about the paint-box, mamma," sobbed the stricken child; "he said he would, and I thought it was a promise. Oh! dear, dear, dear! I have thought so much about it, and Belle and I were so happy!"

And again his sob burst forth, and his whole form was convulsed with his childish grief.

Meanwhile Aunt Emily had coaxed little Belle upstairs, and was beguiling her grief with a wonderful story about a parrot.

It was a hard task for the mother to soothe the child, whose heart was so sorely grieved at his father's thoughtlessness. She, too, had experienced it early in her marriage life, and had learned not to expect any little pleasing remembrance or attentions from her husband, and also not to burden him with any commissions belonging to her household cares.

In her childhood's home her father had never been unmindful of his duties to wife or children, but was always desirous of ministering to their comforts and pleasures. But Mr. Morton had not been trained in a similar school, and he never considered it his duty to burden his mind with the little trifling things which go so far toward completing the sum of woman's happiness.

When the children's grief had been hushed by sleep, Aunt Emily—who had remained to comfort her sister, but who had most wisely refrained from criticising her husband's behaviour—requested permission to purchase the coveted paint-box for Willie.

At first Mrs. Morton rather demurred at granting the request. She feared that her husband might object to it; but her sister's arguments finally prevailed, and she determined to allow her to gratify the child, even at the risk of his father's displeasure.

But Aunt Emily felt sure that Mr. Morton had paid so little heed to the matter, and was so utterly unconscious of the effect he had produced upon the child, that he would not consider her act as intended to rebuke him, but she said—

"Do, dear Annie, tell Dick how injurious it is, to children especially, to partly promise to do something for them and then forget it entirely. You could surely make him understand what unhappiness such thoughtlessness causes to those he loves and cherishes."

Mrs. Morton listened to her sister's kindly ad-

vice attentively; but she knew her husband's disposition far better than her sister could, and was sure that any such attempt upon her part would only lead to a painful scene, for it would anger him, without convincing him that his conduct was not all that a husband's should be.

When Willie received the paint-box his eyes sparkled with pleasure, and his cheeks reddened with joy; yet there was a little sting in its possession. But he thanked his Aunt Emily heartily for her kindness, giving her a close embrace and a kiss as her reward, and, with the box hugged tightly under his arm, he darted away to find his sister and exhibit his prize.

When Mr. Morton saw it, he said,—
"Halloo! where did that come from, Willie? I don't think you deserved to have it, you screamed so horribly the other night. But your mamma and aunt are doing their very best to spoil you."

The colour mounted high on the boy's brow, but he made no reply; yet the way he set his lips tightly together showed to the observer that his little heart had not forgotten the chilling touch of disappointment.

By his friends Mr. Morton was considered an agreeable, kindly gentleman. Yet, as we behold him, he was selfish, unkind, and bad tempered, and the amiability of temper and urbanity of manner which he always displayed in society was a mere outside habiliment, which, like his overcoat, he could lay aside whenever he entered his own door.

Willie really possessed considerable talent for drawing and painting, and coloured the prints his kind aunt had purchased for him, after a little practice, in the pages of his picture-books, in quite a creditable manner. Indeed, so much talent did he display for this pleasing art that finally his father was forced to acknowledge his son's ability, and after his education had been duly attended to he made painting his profession, and his studio became one of the most attractive of its kind in the city.

But among all its beautiful adornments an old, worn-out paint-box could be seen in a conspicuous situation, and when curious eyes were attracted to its incongruous appearance, the only information that was afforded was not always satisfactory to its hearers.

"Only a relic of my childish days," he would say. "A token from a dearly-loved aunt, whose encouragement helped me to become a painter."

THE cowardliness of sharks is well known among men who have been much to sea in Southern waters infested by man-eaters. The fiercest shark will get out of the sea-way in a very great hurry if the swimmer, noticing its approach, sets up a noisy splashing. A shark is in deadly fear of any sort of living thing that splashes water.

THE old sawbuck which has done yeoman service since time immemorial without any change being suggested in its shape has been recently made the subject of an improvement for which a patent has been granted in America. The objects of the invention are to do away with the necessity of putting the knee or the foot upon the stick or log to be held while sawing the same and to provide simple and effective means for holding the stick to be sawed in such manner as to leave the operator in the best position for handling the saw. It consists in the combination with the buck of spring clamping jaws connected with a foot lever or treadle, and operating through a slotted guide fastened to the cross-bar connecting the legs of the sawbuck. When the log has been placed on the sawbuck a slight pressure on the treadle clamps it firmly in place.

AMONG the lower orders of Tokio there exists a curious phase of every-day life. Many men and women who subsist by manual labour find themselves constantly without sufficient funds to buy their dinner. They can pay for their breakfast, but money to get a dinner is wanting. It is their habit, then, to put some of their cooking utensils in pawn, thus obtaining means to pay for their dinner, and when they receive their day's wage in the evening, they are able to redeem the

pledged articles, and also to procure their supper that night and their breakfast and bath the following morning. The pawnbroker, therefore, has to perform thirty transactions monthly in the nature of taking pledges and paying and receiving money. The sum involved each day is very small, and the interest may be anything from fifty to a hundred per cent., but for such troublesome service a high rate of interest cannot reasonably be objected to.

A WONDERFUL growth discovered some time ago in the sandy dry plains of Mexico seems, after all, not to be such a wonder as it was at first believed to be. A species of cactus, the *Fouquieria*, growing in the shape of a tapered column, is rather commonly found thirty feet or more in height. One specimen, however, was found bent into a high arch, both ends of which entered the soil at a distance of six yards from each other. In the centre of the arch a shoot grew out, which is now more than ten feet long. How did this oddity grow thus? The question was answered in a very simple way the other day. An old herder related that, when he was young, he and other cowboys lassoed for fun the highest of the tall cacti they found, and, pulling it down they buried the top of the column in the sand. This end grew roots, and a few years after the superabundance of vitality of this cactus forced for itself a way out in the new shoot, although this species never grows branches ordinarily. Now the plant looks like a gigantic spur.

EGYPTIAN MEDICAL TATTOOING.—An Austrian scientist found upon the body of a priestess who was embalmed in the eleventh dynasty—about 3,000 years B.C.—linear blue marks which he at first supposed were for ornament, but which he afterwards concluded were the result of some vigorous application of remedies. The marks were both below and above the umbilicus, those below running almost horizontally, while those above it ran in a vertical direction. The surgical measures were evidently taken a long time before the death of the woman, and were perhaps intended to cure her of some pelvic trouble, chronic pelvic peritonitis or what not. This method of introducing drugs into the body is still practised in Egypt, and the writer was able to collect details of ninety-seven cases in which it was employed. In most of them the tattooing was done upon the temples for the relief of headache or neuralgia, but in other cases the scarification was made upon the hands, feet, shoulders, knees, buttocks, neck, or abdomen. The technique of this treatment is as follows: From three to seven needles, which are bound together in a bunch, are thrust obliquely into the skin. When blood begins to flow from the punctures thus made, a mixture of milk and soap, to which the juices of various plants has been added, is rubbed into the wounds.

MADAGASCAR WIDOWS.—Upon the death of any man of position, on the day of the funeral the wife is placed in the house, dressed in all her best clothes, and covered with her silver ornaments, of which the *Shinanaka* wears a considerable quantity. There she remains until the rest of the family return home from the tomb. But as soon as they enter the house they begin to revile her with most abusive language, telling her that it is her fault that her husband, or fate, has been stronger than that of her husband, and that she is virtually the cause of his death. They then strip her of her clothes, tearing off with violence the ornaments from her ears and neck and arms; they give her a coarse cloth, a spoon with a broken handle, and a dish with the foot broken off, with which to eat; her hair is dishevelled, and she is covered up with a coarse mat, and under that she remains all day long, and can only leave it at night; and she may not speak to any one who goes into the house. She is not allowed to wash her face or hands, but only the tips of her fingers. She endures all this sometimes for a year, or at least for eight months; and even when that is over, her time of mourning is not ended for a considerable period; for she is not allowed to go home to her own relations until she has been first divorced by her husband's family.

A BLIND BABY.

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ERIC STEPHENS was broken-hearted. His sweet young wife was dead. In his passionate anguish he was almost demented, and to his sister's horror raved like a madman.

"Eric!" she exclaimed, breathlessly, "you must go abroad! It will not do for you to stay here; you will lose your senses." "I"—she hesitated, frowned—"I will take care of the child!"

The faint wail of a week-old infant followed her words.

"I don't think I care much for the child," said the young father, in a hollow voice.

Mrs. Grant made no reply. She was not fond of children herself.

"I will take the baby home with me, and you must go abroad with Louisa."

This arrangement was finally made. Eric Stephens went abroad with his sister's stepson, Louis Fenn, and she took the child to The Willows, as her country seat was called.

Everybody seconded Mrs. Grant's advice, and allowing that what everybody approved must be right, her brother made his arrangements for the change in a silent, spiritless way, at the last asking, as if he had hitherto forgotten it, to see the child.

His sister brought it. It was very tiny for a fortnight-old baby, looking smaller even than at its birth.

"I don't think it will live," said Eric, in the same monotonous voice he had used since Nita died.

Mrs. Grant thoughtfully wrapped the baby again in its flannels. Perhaps if Eric did not go away, but remained and grew anxious over the child, it would be better for him.

She idolized her brother—was very proud of him. She began to consider that she would have him more to herself, since the pretty young wife, of whom she had been jealous, was gone. But all arrangements were perfected, they had been made by her advice, and she held her peace.

In the same black garb in which she had attended pretty Nita's funeral, she descended from the carriage, and ascended the terraces of The Willows, the child in her arms.

She was a wealthy widow. The helpless little being she bore in her arms into her stately mansion might have been, had she been a different kind of woman, a boon to her. But she had never had a child, and she did not love children.

She meant to provide every comfort for this one, however, relinquishing her own chamber to establish a sunny nursery for the baby—for was it not Eric's child and heiress? A fortune waited for the tiny creature.

But the baby did not thrive. It was restless and wailed a great deal, and when it was a month old the nurse said,—

"She's at the proper age to take a little notice, Mrs. Grant. Do you see anything the matter with her eyes?"

Something in the woman's tones made the lady look at her.

"Her eyes? Bring her to the light."

She bent over the child, carefully scrutinizing the tiny orbs.

"Why," she said, slowly, "there seems a shadow, a film over her eyes. They are not as dark as I thought. What is the matter?"

"I'm fearing, ma'am," said the nurse with feeling, "that there's cataracts coming over the eyes."

Mrs. Grant sprang back, a look of aversion upon her features.

"Oh, horrors! She will be a fright—a monstrosity!"

"It's a great affliction, surely; but perhaps the doctor can cure her."

Mrs. Grant left the nursery. But every day she came several times and looked at the baby.

She had had a letter from its father. The sea voyage had benefited his health. He had been warmly welcomed by many people; he would probably remain abroad several years.

The child's countenance was growing unattractive as the film thickened over its eyes. There could

be no doubt that it was a case of cataract. It did not need a doctor to confirm what was evident to the most casual observer.

Mrs. Grant was shocked and passionately rebellious against this unlooked-for affliction. She had been a Stephen, and the Stephens had all been noted for their beauty.

She had expected that Eric's child would inherit the family comeliness and grace. Instead—why she would be hideous!

She had heard of people having this deformity removed; but did it not generally return? Had not the eyes always an unpleasant expression? And the babe was such an unpeaceful, ailing creature. Better it were dead! she declared.

She had a second letter from Eric, and this time he asked for special tidings of the child. She wrote him that it was ill.

She seldom went to the nursery now. The baby cried constantly, as if it knew and rebelled against its fate.

Mrs. Grant fancied she heard it when she could not in her distant apartments. The infant became a nightmare to her. She did not try to conceal from herself that she hoped it would die.

She brooded over the matter by day and night. Her brain became overcharged. Eric might marry again and have beautiful children. This one should not inherit the vast Stephen's fortune! It was wrong—mere weakness and folly—to allow an accident of birth to, vampire like, suck all the happiness from her brother's life. The child was not ill enough to die. It would live and gain a hold in the world, and this must be prevented before too late.

One morning Mrs. Grant entered the nursery. "Get the child ready as soon as you can," she said to the nurse. "I am going to take it into the country to board, where it will be better."

She was already partly dressed for travelling, and in an hour took the baby away.

In two days she returned home, and wrote to her brother that the air of The Willows not agreeing with the child she had sent it to the seaside to nurse.

Mrs. Grant supped luxuriously that night, and while she slept Policeman Gippe, following a faint walling, descended an area in a dark and narrow street of Liverpool to stumble over a basket.

"A baby, by George!"

The Inspector at the police-station was very busy with his papers when Gippe entered, but he looked up at the faint, quivering cry which proceeded from the policeman's basket.

"Another?" he said.

"This one is blind," answered the man, in a suppressed voice.

He uncovered the basket, and the inspector rose and looked over the railing of his table the pitiful atom turning its sightless orbs from side to side, and seeking nourishment with gaping mouth and weak cries. Nothing living could have been more helpless and miserable.

"It's nigh about dead with cold," said Gippe.

"Umph! Give it to the matron. Take it to the workhouse in the morning if it is alive."

The inspector was not a talking man, but an expression of sadness passed briefly over his iron face.

There was a sick woman and a stray child in the matron's room. The latter was a large, fair woman with a quiet face.

"What have you there—a foundling?"

Gippe nodded.

She took the basket, and raised the child.

"A blind baby, and only a few weeks old! Let it in a basement this chilly night! Well, there are nice people in this world!"

"It isn't likely enough for anyone to want, you see," said Gippe, lingering to see the wail laid on the matron's lap before the fire, and lay tiny hands covered with her own warm palms. "I'll just step into the kitchen and see that Jim gets some hot milk directly. Shall I?"

"Yes."

The sick woman, who lay on a settee, lifted her head from the pillow.

"No mother ever did that," she said.

"I don't know," answered the matron. "There are strange women as well as men."

In the morning the baby was living, and was taken to the workhouse.

Fate has strange chances!

When Eric Stephens returned from Russia he did not—as Mrs. Grant expected—look about him for a second wife.

The one woman he had loved was dead. The letter from his sister, bearing tidings that his child was dead, was an old one when he again entered his home.

It was not strange, he knew, that a motherless infant should die, but the news had given him a pang. And then he believed that he had worn suffering out.

For the next fifteen years he devoted himself to business, and amassed great wealth.

About eight years after his return, he was urged to become one of the directors of an orphan asylum.

Among the destitute children brought in was a little girl, very frail and sensitive. But he thought her pretty, and, to Mrs. Grant's displeasure, adopted her.

"Who is she?" she asked, coldly.

"She has been a friendless wail, with an unknown history. She is now my daughter. She is one of the few children I can love. I see no reason why I should deny myself the pleasure of cherishing her," Stephens replied, rather sternly—for his relations with his sister were not always harmonious.

"I know the secret of your taking such a step. The child looks like Nita," she replied, with a severe glance.

He forgot, in his pleasure, to resent her words.

"Do you see it? I thought so. Nita shall be her name!"

And he took the little girl between his knees and kissed her.

Henceforth his defrauded heart overflowed upon the child. She grew up a modest, sweet violet of a girl, utterly unspoiled by indulgence and luxury.

But Mrs. Grant never liked her for growing more and more to look like the mother of the cruelly abandoned baby.

Mrs. Grant had strictly justified herself in taking this extreme step, but her hair was grey, and she had aged in appearance greatly, for she was a young woman when her brother's wife died.

Her stepson had married, her husband had lost his money and died, and she was installed the mistress of her brother's home when Nita was adopted. The latter could not like her, but she delighted her father.

She loved young Dr. Cross, too. And why not, since he was her lover, and as fine and ardent a young fellow as could well be! Stephens approved the union, and the young girl's life was very bright and beautiful.

Then came a catastrophe and all the horrors of sudden death. Eric Stephens was thrown from his carriage and killed.

No will could be found.

Mrs. Grant put in a claim for the whole of her brother's property, and, by the aid of unscrupulous lawyers, seemed likely to get it.

"An adopted child does not inherit unless by special provision," she said, boldly, to Nita.

The young girl was bitterly grieved.

"Papa did not intend it so. He loved me. He would not leave me penniless!" she declared.

"I can give you a good home, my darling, not quite so luxurious as this, but with all comforts," said young Cross.

"It is not that. Papa is wronged. He meant this house, which has sheltered my childish head, to be my home as long as I lived. He has told me so!"

Mrs. Grant's conduct was insufferable. At every turn she insulted Nita, and called her an intruder, a beggar, an outcast, whom her brother had benevolently harboured.

The poor girl was wild with pain, but she kept the worst of her sufferings from her lover.

One day he entered the house and begged to take Nita out.

"I do not care to drive!"

"But I have a purpose!"

She yielded and they went to the Consumptive Hospital.

An emaciated woman, stretched on one of the little cots, took and held Nita's hand.

"Miss Stephens, I know about your trouble, and I am going to help you. Mr. Grant was my enemy. My husband deserted me; he was a graceless fellow, but I loved him."

"I took service with Mrs. Grant, but she turned me and my baby out of her house. I had no friends, and I wandered about the streets until I fainted for food, and was taken to the police-station, where the matron helped and consoled me. But my little babe died."

"While I was at the station an abandoned babe—blind—was brought in. The matron examined its clothing to find some mark of identity. She found none."

"But I was more fortunate. A handkerchief had been accidentally dropped in the basket which I recognised. I had often washed it at Mrs. Grant's house; it bore her initials. I kept it."

"I kept track of you. I knew your blindness was removed at the workhouse. You went to one orphan asylum after another, from various causes, until, to my joy, Mr. Stephens adopted you."

"Why, child, be your own father; I have traced out all the story. Here are papers which will prove it at every point, and that cold and wicked woman will not triumph. I have made it my study for years to defeat her, and I have done it. And now I do not dread to die for I shall see my child her cruelty killed."

The woman's name was Jane Bond.

Doctor Cross's father, a noted physician, had known her for years, and her proofs of the story she told had been prepared with a care that showed her to be an uncommon woman.

Her wrongs had made her revengeful to a good purpose, for, to Nita's joy, her statements were found undeniable even by Mrs. Grant's most skillful attorneys.

The latter went into obscurity, where her meditations probably accompanied her, and prevented her enjoying the happiness of the good and just.

Nita succeeded to her father's beautiful house, where she was very happy, feeling that such had been his wish.

When it came out that Doctor Cross's father had operated upon her eyes in infancy, and been the instrument of restoring to her sight and beauty, it was an added source of joy to both her and her young husband.

A BERLIN inventor has discovered a process for making writing-paper that will not burn. He has also invented a peculiar ink that resists the action of fire, and remains upon the paper as a dark-brown sediment.

MANY people make a mistake in speaking of the Aztecs sweepingly, as if Mexico were yet largely inhabited by them. This proud, pathetic race, the last of the race to flourish on the Mexican continent at the time of the Spanish invasion, are now but few in number. The treasure of their kings buried in the great lakes, their last monarch hung by the cruel conqueror, their beautiful valley given over to fire and sword, their immense temples and wide-stretched city utterly destroyed, the Aztecs left for ever the valley of Mexico and a few of them are now among the hills of Puebla, while others, few also, are said to live along the Pacific coast. The Aztec type is rare enough. Unlike the Toltecs they do not deform their skulls. They are dolichocephalous, with narrow foreheads, have flat noses sloping almost straight from the forehead; black eyes, large mouth, thick purple lips, short, regular teeth set in rose-coloured gums and thick, coarse, black hair. They wear little or no beard. They have a dull bronze-coloured skin, with a lighter hue in the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet and are ugly rather than handsome. Such are the Aztecs as found to-day in fragmentary bands and in isolated parts of Mexico.

BROWN EYES AND BLUE.

CHAPTER XIV.

"No, I'll not weep. I have full cause for weeping, but this heart shall break into a hundred thousand flames ere I will weep.
O fool! I shall go mad!"

A shadow has fallen on my heart—a strange, weird, horrible shadow—which has already taken the sweet savour out of my life, and made it barren, drear, cheerless as a withered branch on its parent stem.

There is a summer and winter in human hearts, and it is winter with me now; yet the flowers still bloom in the sunbeams, the choir of birds still chant their matins and evensong at dawn and eve, and the fields yet laugh and sing in their summer garments of blossoming richness.

Time has carried this shadow on his back and launched it full at my feet, and my heart is full of strange, inexplicable, rending anguish, for a blight, a withering horror, has fallen upon it, and love is going its way, leaving me alone—quite alone!

Let me tell you of it in my own way, and then pity me; give me all your pity, for, indeed, I need it sorely. My story is a terribly bitter one—so bitter that it almost seems as if it could be but a phantom sorrow, not a real, aching grief. Well, let me tell it quickly, get it over and put away out of sight, sound, and mind, lest by brooding over it reason shall play me false and make me regret what is past and done; and that cannot, must not, be. So listen, then.

Colin came back to Gable End instead of the Rectory, as father wished. I, of course, welcomed him with all my loving heart and outstretched arms. It seemed ages since I had gazed on those dear brown eyes and heard his voice calling me his "Blue Eyes."

Looking back on it now, how very, very sweet it was! That memory, at least, brings me no pang. The others, too, all greeted him most heartily, seeming really glad to see him once more. But he himself, poor fellow, was sadly out of spirits. Daryl's affair weighed heavily upon him. Many a talk had we over it. I much wanted to ask dear father's advice about it, but Colin so earnestly begged me not to mention it, at any rate, not until later, if nothing could be really done to extricate his brother from the consequences of his own misdoing.

I promised to do as he wished in the matter, and wait until it was absolutely necessary to let father hear; and, as Colin very truly said, he was still extremely unwell, and any sudden news like that might naturally upset him and make him worse.

Poor Colin, how he harped upon that one theme of my breaking off the engagement because of Daryl's fault! That seemed to worry him and make him unhappy more than the rest. Vainly I assured him that I would not, indeed, could not, do it. He always answered,—

"Not you, my darling, perhaps, but your people will for you, and no wonder. I could not blame them so very much if they did; it would only be just that your future, at least, should not be soiled with a disgraceful history."

"But you are blameless, Colin. I am going to marry you, not Daryl, or your family," I urged.

"True, Blue Eyes; but I feel, nevertheless, they will part you and me, and then I shan't care a fig to live; better blow my brains out at once, I think, and save trouble."

"My dearest boy, don't talk like that; I won't listen to you if you do."

Then we kissed, and so it ended for the time being. Our discussions usually ended in this manner, though they might be renewed not very long after on the self-same subjects. However, it always seemed an efficient and charming epilogue to our discourse, and I for one could find no fault with it. I think in that time I showed my love more openly, more fully than I had hitherto done; for I saw that the idea of

losing me really weighed heavily on my lover's mind; and however much he understood that my true devotion would keep me faithful to him, other wills than ours, other circumstances, might combine to sever us two.

Ah! my love, my love, if it had but rested there all would have been well with our troth. No shadow would have veiled our bliss, no terrible suspicions wrecked our hope; no grim, hard, incontrovertible facts would have ground my heart's love in the mill of doubt, and let me see with my own eyes the awful verification of suspicions, which I tried so very hard to cast away from me as impossible, but which forced themselves upon me in all their hideously naked truth; and made me, as I am, shorn of happiness.

Colin had been back with us for five days, when father, instead of getting better as we all hoped he would, became suddenly much worse.

As yet we had not had Dr. Plaskit from Ristford, our usual Æsculapius in any temporary ailments—which, thank Heaven, we had always been remarkably free from, fresh air and exercise being antidotes to illness in our case—simply because dear father always had an antipathy to calling in a doctor, and kept on saying each day he should be better the next, with all our tender little nursing in the shape of beef tea, &c., and also some medicine which he had been in the habit of taking, whenever at all ailing, for years past, being an old prescription of a dead and gone physician; a large bottle of this mixture father had made up when first taken poorly, and which he had taken regularly every night and morning since.

However, on this fifth morning he seemed so completely worse, unable to get up, and suffering much from excessive faintness, a sensation of giddiness, and an intermittent, irregular pulse, that aunt, evidently alarmed, and not knowing exactly what to do, expressed her desire that Dr. Plaskit should be sent for. Even father said he could not understand what ailed him, or account for the faintness, which seemed to steal over him every now and again, and cloud all feeling of brain and mind.

So Michael rode over to Ristford by aunt's desire, though Colin had, immediately on aunt's expression of opinion at the breakfast table as to the seriousness of father's malady, whatever it might be, offered to go, begging that he might be made of some use.

However, Aunt Rachel emphatically negatived the suggestion, and so Colin and I betook ourselves to the little morning-room, where I gave him some of father's colics to rub up, while I every now and then stole upstairs to see how my dear father was, wishing the doctor would soon come and relieve our natural anxiety, while aunt waited for him in the dining-room, and Lella remained in her own room writing letters.

At last Dr. Plaskit made his appearance, being brought back with Michael. He remained in father's room a long time, then he and aunt were closeted in the dining-room, evidently talking over the case for nearly an hour; then he came out, and I, waiting for him at the old oaken door, asked him what was the matter with my father.

"He'll soon get better, Miss Colla," he responded to my question, settling the reins over his mare's neck while he spoke. "I'm coming again in a day or so; in the meantime I'll send over something for him to take. I've given Mrs. Lucelles all directions, you need not be alarmed, it's—it's only a passing indisposition," and, stepping up into the saddle, he rode away.

I heard a heavy sigh behind me as he went off, and, turning quickly round, saw aunt, with a face of deepest concern, watching me. She it was who sighed.

"Is father very ill, aunt?" I asked, quickly, fearful of that ominous sigh. "Why would not Dr. Plaskit tell me what was the matter with him?"

"There is nothing serious in the matter with my brother-in-law. As Dr. Plaskit said, merely a passing indisposition; he will soon be better, much better. You need not alarm yourself unnecessarily," returned aunt, as she turned away

down the hall and through into the still-room to superintend some beef-tea making.

I went back to Colin, still rubbing away vigorously at the colics with the leather I had given him.

"Well, Blue Eyes," he said, as I entered; "what's the news, good or bad? What does the doctor say?"

"He says it's nothing serious, we need not be alarmed at all, and that dear father will soon be well," I answered, cheerily, for, after all, both the doctor and aunt seemed to make light of it.

Oh! that I had said he was ill—very ill, that we must watch and pray for his recovery—anything, indeed, but what I did, since it left no trace of anxiety, no touch of suspicion that all was not as it should be on my lover's mind; left him free to act and plan as he chose, to forge a link in that awful chain of miserable thought which urged him to a deed that time can never wipe out, try as it may. How could I know—how, indeed, could I guess, that by my innocent, careless speech, I was paving the way blindfold to sorrow's path? Had I but known it then—could I but have dreamed how things were—what a different answer would I have made—how carefully I would have spoken! Well, it was not to be; fate willed it differently.

"I am glad of that, my Blue Eyes!" answered my lover, gaily. "I thought it would not turn out anything very serious; at least I hoped so. Is the doctor coming again, or does he not consider it necessary?"

"He did not exactly say when he was coming again, though I asked him. In a day or two, though, I suppose. It's a good sign, at any rate, his not wishing to come over soon. He told aunt all that was necessary for dear father to have; and I expect we shall have him down in the library again to-morrow very likely."

"I sincerely trust we may," returned Colin, putting a brightened coin back into the box with the rest; "one misses his cheery voice and pleasant face at meal-times. I thoroughly appreciate your father in every respect, my Blue Eyes!" he ended earnestly, and then we drifted into speaking of other things; until Colin said he thought he would walk over to the Rectory, and let Miss Hannah and Mr. Barlow hear how father was, as they had sent over twice yesterday, anxiously inquiring after him, having heard in the village that he was ailing.

So away my lover started, and I wandered off into the garden to pluck a few sweet-scented flowers to make into a fragrant posy to take into father's room for him, knowing his passion for flowers, which I inherit, and could therefore sympathise with, judging his love by mine.

I had told Colin that we should not expect him back to lunch, for I knew that Miss Hannah would want him to stay, and I begged that he would do so if she asked him. Did we not owe a lasting debt of gratitude to her, kind good soul that she was?

But for her I might never have known how sweet love is! Yes! and how very full of pain, too, I can now add. Anyway, I wished him to remain, and was, therefore, not in any degree astonished by his absence at the lunch table.

Aunt asked where he was, and I told her, whereat she made no comment, only looked across at Lella, who gazed back at her, and I fancied that each knew what the other meant. However, it mattered not to me, I thought, and dismissed myself soon after, lunch being a meal quickly dispensed with.

It must have been quite two hours later, when I, sitting at my lattice window, book in hand, and looking out for Colin's return—for I could see the Marling-road for some distance—was awakened from a pleasant reverie by a gentle knock at the door.

Naturally I said, "Come in!" and as naturally the knocker obeyed, and in walked Lella. She looked a little pale, and a pink-tinted, eyelid might mean recently shed tears. She began her errand at once thus,—

"Colin! I have come to tell you that I think I had better leave Gable End as soon as you can let me go," she said timidly, and with an air of reluctance.

"As soon as I can let you go!" I echoed.

amazedly; for, mind you, I had received no atom of hint as to any such intention of quitting us at a moment's notice as it were. "I really don't comprehend what you mean, Lella. Why do you wish to go so suddenly? What is the matter?"

"I must go," she returned quickly. "I feel I cannot stay any longer—now."

"But why?" I argued, letting my book fall on my lap; "why now more than yesterday, and the day before, or the day before that? Do explain yourself. Why such a mysterious determination delivered in such a mysterious manner? Why that emphatic now!"—and I gazed up at her full of inquiry.

"Oh! there are many things, Celia, which make me wish to leave Gable End," she rejoined hurriedly, interlarding her fingers nervously; "things I really can't explain, and even, if I could, you would not hear them. I can only repeat that the sooner I go the better for my peace of mind."

Knowing Lella well by this time I recognised that she quite expected me to question her on the subject, though she professed her unwillingness to enlighten me as to the cause; and that, in all human probability, a few more questions on my part and answers on hers would elicit the truth, and bring it to the light of day.

"Good heavens, Lella, don't be so obscure!" I exclaimed; rather testily, "say out what you mean; don't hint mysteriously and give them no cause. Tell me outright why this sudden resolution of going, the reason, and excuse!" and I felt that I put it quite lawyer-like, tersely and to the point.

The fingers nervously worked together, then she burst out,—

"No, Celia; no, I can't tell you, I can't; don't ask me any more!" which of course meant that I should demand an answer, which I accordingly did.

"You must tell me," I put in, abruptly; "I desire to know, and I do not consider it right of you to keep me in the dark. You are my guest, father's and mine, and I demand to know what you have to complain of!"—then I stood up and faced her.

Lella whom I have never known to quail before anyone, certainly not before my humble self, takes out her handkerchief, covers her eyes and gives vent to a sob.

"You are very cruel to ask me, cruel to make me tell you. You'll hate me when I've told you, and yet you want me to. Remember, it's no fault of mine. I would much rather you heard it from some one else, and of course you will hear it, because Aunt Lascelles will have to tell you; but I'd much rather it wasn't me. I'd sooner go back to London at once before you do hear it," and here came another sob.

"Know what?" I asked sharply. "What is there to know, that I don't know already? I shall not blame you for telling me, be very sure of that. Come, what is it?" and I tapped my foot on the waxed-oak floor.

"Oh! please don't ask me. I beg you not to, Celia," said Lella, from behind her handkerchief.

"Go on," I returned petulantly, "I wish to hear. If you do not tell me I shall go to aunt at once, so you need not imagine to keep whatever it may be from me."

"If I do tell you," she gulped out at length, "you must promise me faithfully not to say a word to anybody—to no one, mind—"

"Is it such a secret then?" I exclaimed rather loftily, "because if it is a secret of your own I do not care to hear it. I dislike having other people's secrets to take care of; I find my own few quite sufficient for one small brain. No, if it is a secret, keep it to yourself; that is always the wisest plan."

"It isn't," she hurriedly interrupted. "It concerns us all, more or less, and it won't remain hidden long. But you must promise, promise me on your honour to keep silence, for the present at least."

"Well, I promise," I returned slowly, after a pause.

"Not to speak of it to a single soul, not even to—Celia Boughton!" she added, lingeringly.

"Make haste, then; I promise what you ask.

If it is to come out, sooner or later, a few hours more or less to him will make no difference, and I do not consider myself bound by that promise for all time. Well, what is it?"

"Oh, it's dreadful, telling you. I don't like doing it at all. I wish it were anyone but me, only don't, please, don't hate me afterwards. I'm sure I don't know whether I ought or not, whether it's right of me. Perhaps Aunt Lascelles would not wish me to. What shall I do?" and Lella wrung her hands.

By this time I was worked up to the highest tension of nervous curiosity and apprehension. It was clear to me that Lella had really something to communicate which she thought would prove unpleasant, and which, rightly or wrongfully, she desired to withhold from me. But she had gone the very surest way to make me eagerly desirous of hearing this mysterious communication, and so it was almost angrily that I said,—

"Do you mean to tell me or not, Lella? Yes or no. If not, I shall straightway go to aunt's room and ask her. Surely you need not be so frightened about it? I shall not murder you for telling me."

She gave a little gasp as I ended my sentence, "No," she rejoined queerly, "you would not, but others might."

"Others? What others? You are talking perfect balderdash," I exclaimed, scornfully. "Why, one would imagine, to hear you, that dear old Gable End housed murderers as it does mice—grow them as one grows fruits!" and I laughed in pure derision of the absurd idea.

"Ah! there has been many a true word spoken in jest before now," she returned, shaking her head sorrowful, and wiping her eyes. "You may not be so very far out in your reckoning as you may think. You asked me just now why I wanted to leave Gable End, where I have spent so many cherished hours, free from care"—unctuously—"in a haven of peace and plenty. Well, you shall hear why. The reason I wish to go is because I, for one, have no desire of lying under the awful imputation of being a—a murderer," she ended, hesitatingly.

"Good heavens, Lella! are you gone stark raving mad?" I said, bursting out into a loud laugh.

"I almost wish I were, but I am not. It is the truth I am telling you now, though you may not believe me. At present we all lie under it. You, I, Aunt Lascelles, and everyone," she said, emphatically.

"But why? For what reason? I believe you're dreaming, Lella. You can't be awake to talk such nonsense. Why?"

"Because—oh! Celia, it seems really too horrible to say—because your dear father's medicine has been tampered with," and she sank her voice to a low whisper, as if in fear.

I stared at her in wide-eyed utter amazement—stared stonily, overwhelmed, trying to grasp the meaning of her speech. She must be mad, I thought.

"Tampered with!" I echoed, at length. "My own dear father's medicine tampered with! What can you mean?"

"Alas! I am telling you the terrible truth, Dr. Plaskitt confided to Aunt Lascelles his private opinion and perfect conviction, from all he saw of Mr. Lascelles' state, that the medicine had, as he himself expressed it, been 'tampered with,'" she answered, more quietly.

"But I do not quite understand yet, Lella. Tell me more plainly," I asked, gazing fixedly in her face to glean information. You see I was still in a maze of astonishment, and could not yet determine what she really meant. She looked carefully round the room, as if to see no one lingered near; then she came up close against me, and stooping her head to a level with mine, where I sat in the deep osken window seat, she whispered hoarsely and impressively, as if determined this time I should not mistake her meaning, or grope any more in the dark,—

"I mean to say that someone has been trying to—poison your father," and she raised her head again.

I felt a sudden cold shiver run through my whole frame, and I know I must have been

white to the very lips, as I echoed the frightful word,—

"Poison!"

Someone trying to poison the dearly loved father, whom I adored, and whom everyone in and around Marling revered and respected. Why, he had not one single enemy in all the wide world. How could he have? He had never wronged a living soul, and was loved by all and each. Oh! it could not be. To wish to murder father in his own old home, to try and poison him! No, it was too ghastly, too horrible an idea to credit. It could not possibly be true.

All this and much more careered madly through my mind, as I vainly tried to image what Lella said to my own comprehension; staring vacantly at her upright figure standing silently by my side.

"How did you know? How did Dr. Plaskitt know? Perhaps he was wrong," I gasped out at last through my dry lips.

"He said all the symptoms pointed to it; only he would not positively assert it was so until he had made sure. He begged that no hint of it should leak out before he was absolutely certain; and Aunt Lascelles would not have told me, only I happened to go into her room and found her so terribly upset that I made her tell me what was the matter. She has no idea I have told you, and I'm sure she would not wish it," she ended, doubtfully, eyeing me.

"Then why did you tell me?" I said, my voice full of intense pain; "oh! why did you?"

"Because you left me no alternative, Celia. I said you would be sorry you made me tell you, only you forced me to do so. You cannot deny that, can you?" she rejoined, with an injured air.

"No, I know I made you tell me. What is Dr. Plaskitt going to do?" I queried, still low-voiced and painfully, with an effort.

"Well, he told aunt he should send a bottle of fresh medicine this afternoon, which is to be substituted for the other without anyone knowing it. Then in the morning when he comes he will just take it away and analyze it."

"Does anyone beside aunt, you and I, Lella, know of this, this awful suspicion, for it is only a suspicion as yet?"

"No," she returned, quickly; "remember, it was quite by chance I got it from Aunt Lascelles. But, you see, I was not so very far wrong when I said we all, every one of us, lay under a horrid imputation of being a would-be murderer."

"If it is, indeed, true that father's medicine has had poison mixed in it, of course someone put it there," I said, thoughtfully.

"Put it there wilfully," she amended, forcibly; "of sheer malice aforethought."

"Oh! who could have done it?" I broke out, passionately sorrowful, "who could have been guilty of so vile a deed, so vile a thought?"

"I wonder. Perhaps it was one of the servants."

"Why should it be? They could have no reason for doing it."

"True, neither had Aunt Lascelles or Michael, or—or you, for instance," she ended, hesitatingly.

"I! Great Heaven! Lella," I cried, in sudden pain. "I! his own child! How can you say anything so horrible, even as an example?"

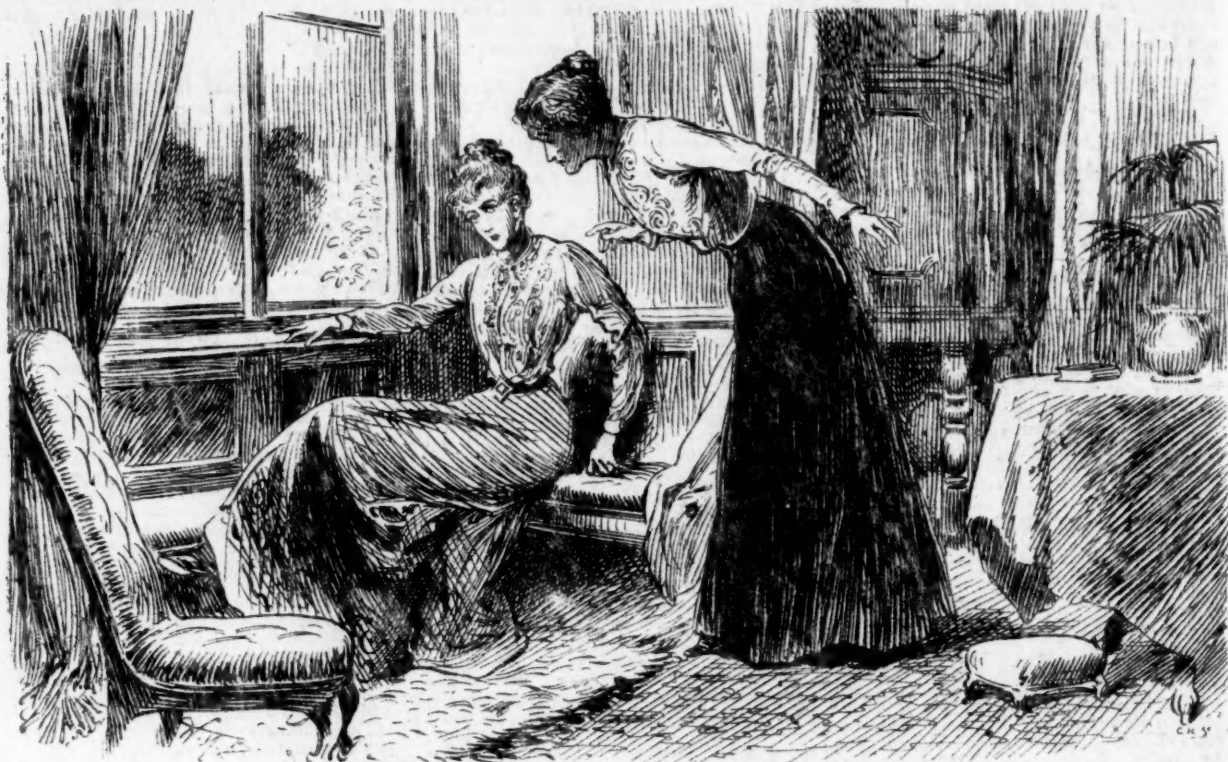
"Well," she returned, queerly, "as you said just now, it must have been put there, and, of course, someone must have put it. If not aunt, Michael, the servants, or yourself, there but remains myself and Celia Boughton."

My heart gave a fierce leap when she said this almost calmly, as if enunciating an ordinary commonplace. Why should she dare to bring in Colin's name? Colin, my lover, my heart's delight, all my happiness.

"I can swear by all I hold sacred it is not I," she went on, fervently. "I am not guilty of so dastardly an act—" and she paused.

I jumped off my seat, and stood erect before her.

"Say no more, Lella!" I cried, hoarsely, "you have said enough. I wish to hear no more. Heaven knows who is guilty, if guilt there be. I want to be alone and think it all over. I thank you for telling me—it was right I should know.



"I MEAN TO SAY THAT SOMEONE HAS BEEN TRYING TO POISON YOUR FATHER!" WHISPERED LEILA.

Leave me alone now, please. I must think it all over."

"You promised to keep it secret until Dr. Plaskit is sure of it himself, remember," she put in, softly, eyeing me as if she were not certain whether I did not intend to fly at her like some wild animal. "You won't forget your promise, will you? You promised me so faithfully."

"And I shall keep my word," I answered, coldly.

"And you won't let Aunt Lascelles know I told you, because she might be angry with me," she urged again, still watchfully eyeing me, "and aunt has always been so kind to me that I should not like to offend her in the smallest way."

"I will not betray your confidence, Leila; you need be under no apprehension. I shall leave aunt to tell her own story whenever she pleases, if that is what you mean. No, I will not betray you," and I turned slowly away from her.

Somehow the sight of her standing near, watching me as if she dreaded an outbreak, seemed to irritate me beyond endurance.

"If I can help you at all in any way," she began, timidly, moving towards me, but I cut her short at once.

"You cannot. Thank you all the same. I need no help. I want to be alone."

Then at last she left me to my own brooding. "I hope I haven't done wrong in telling her," I heard her say, *adto voce*, as she softly opened the door, passed out, and closed it behind her.

I drew a long, sobbing kind of breath when I found myself alone, and fell on my knees against the mullioned window, resting my head against the open framework to catch the summer air, for I felt stifled, faint, dizzy with inward nervous excitement.

The air seemed full of sighings and whisperings, dreadful thoughts and fancies, phantoms of horrible doubt and dread. I felt as if I were groping in the dark to find a ray of light—groping to touch peace of mind and happiness,

which seemed swallowed up in blackness for evermore.

I tried to picture it over in my mind again, to follow Leila's story; tried to fathom the horrible mystery. Who could desire father's death so much as to try and poison him? Surely not aunt, or Michael—his death to them would mean a very different state of things. Then Leila was quite out of the question—she would neither gain nor lose, if even such a monstrous sin could enter into her head to commit. No, I absolved her completely. She was not guilty. As she herself said, there only remained Collin! my Collin!

Oh! no, surely not, not Collin, I cried in inward mind anguish. Not my lover, my dear, my loved Collin. Let me cast away that thought as too foul, too unutterably horrible to remain one moment. He would gain truly, because my money would, of course, be his to use if he wished, and all mother's money would then be mine. But he could not, surely he could not dream of such an awful, ghastly sin. The man who loved and trusted him, received him as an honoured guest and future son, to whom he was giving his daughter in all faith and trust!

Not Collin, dear Heaven; oh! not my Collin, I cried in an agony to myself, while the summer wind set the rose petals floating and murmured through the trees as if it echoed my pitiful prayer.

Thus I sat and thought and planned what I would do. It was a simple plan enough, but one which I determined upon carrying out. If poison had been mixed with dear father's medicine it must have been done in the night-time, when all the rest of Gable End were sleeping soundly, innocently, fearlessly, dreaming of no evil whatever.

This I felt certain could be the only time when such a deed would be done in safety, free from observation. Hence I meant to watch near father all the night through, without letting anyone know of my intention, so that if the poisoner came to drug the medicine again I might

thus see with my own eyes who had it in their mind to send my beloved father to that land from whence there is no returning path, and whose King is death.

(To be continued.)

THIS STORY COMMENCED IN NO. 1895. BACK NUMBERS CAN STILL BE HAD.

NEW rules have lately been issued regulating the quantity of hair a soldier may wear on his face, and withdrawing the privilege which has for many years been accorded to pioneers in the Army of wearing beards. In the future if Tommy Atkins wishes to wear whiskers he must only allow them to grow a very moderate length, and anything approaching the Dundreary type is rigorously tabooed. Only a moustache and a little whisker on the cheek will be allowed hereafter.

A DUTCHMAN has invented an automatic physician. In appearance the machine is a dignified metal man, the front of whose waistcoat is pierced with a number of openings, over each of which is inscribed the name of one of the commoner ailments to which humanity is subject. You put a penny in the slot set apart for your particular illness, and out pops a small packet of medicine. This automatic doctor may be consulted by the sound as well as by the sick, for one of the slots delivers a "refresher and tonic" distilled from wholesome herbs.

A SHIELD or protector for bottles while being opened has been designed and patented. It consists of two shells of metal adapted to receive the bottle by the two parts fitting around it, and completely covering it. The inside has rubber cushions to prevent the breaking of the glass by contact with the hard metal, and on the outside are projections, designed to offer a gripping surface for the hands. Should the bottle break during the process of opening, the hands of the operator will be entirely protected from harm.



ON THE STEPS DUDLEY WENTWORTH WAS STANDING, WITH A SMILE ON HIS LIPS.

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

CHAPTER X

"THE VICTIM OF POLLY."

"Sit down," said General Forrester, pointing to a chair, and at the same time eyeing his niece curiously, "I shall not keep you long."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when there came a resounding crash from the room on the opposite side of the landing which was the General's own dressing-room, and a splashing as of a monstrous bird thrown into water. Sibel nearly bounded out of her chair, wondering if it could be the Major come to grief in his wanderings in a strange house; but her uncle only frowned, and, annoyed at his own involuntary start, muttered:

"That idiot Mary tumbling over a can!"

Then he cleared his throat, settled his tie, drew himself up to his full height, which was not much above five feet nine, and began in his usual monotonous tone:

"Wentworth is downstairs."

She clasped her hands tight, and every scrap of colour left her face. It only required this to make her martyrdom complete.

"I imagine someone has taken the trouble to investigate our domestic affairs, and make them public. There is a proverb about washing your dirty linen at home, but it has been disregarded, and that which is enough to make your poor father rise from his grave has been published right and left through the neighbourhood. I don't know if you thought it was the best way of exciting public compassion!"

"I do not want compassion," throwing back her head, scornfully; "and I only wish that I were dead, that no one might hear of me again!"

"Humph! more tragic than true. If you wanted to be so retiring, why did you proclaim your disgrace upon the house tops?" with a slight sneer.

"I never did. I have been a prisoner for ever so long; you seem to forget it."

"Prisoners can write."

"Others can, but I had no one to write to."

"Not even Wentworth—a man whom you have known for a twelvemonth!"

"I never wrote to him in my life!" her cheeks growing crimson, as in a moment it flashed like a vision through her brain—that meeting at the gate, when his lips had touched her cheek, and their hearts seemed to beat to the same measure!

"Nor sent him a message!"

"No!"

"Then someone else did," frowning hard in his perplexity; "and the outcome of it all is that Lord Wentworth wishes to know if you would like to share his home for the future."

Sibel opened her eyes in the greatest surprise.

"Well, what is your answer?" snapped the General.

"Of course I should!" a gleam of joy shining in her eyes. "There's nothing on earth I should like better."

"And you think yourself fit to go to Wentworth Chase, when I tell you that I do not consider you worthy to remain at Coombe Lodge!"

"Certainly I do!" with calm dignity. It lasted but for a moment, and her lip quivered. It was such joy to find that Dudley had not forgotten her. Though he had met her so coldly at the door of the church he had been caring for her, and thinking of her interests all the while.

"I—I—thank him from the bottom of my heart," she said, brokenly, whilst the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I think you ought to," said the General, drily.

There was a knock at the door.

"Please, Sir, Major Lushington is downstairs, and wants to speak to you very particular," said Priscilla, standing in the doorway, like a sentinel.

"At this time of night!"

"It's very particular, the gentleman says."

"Show him into the library."

Then turning to Sibel,—

"Do you know anything of this? Have you sent for him?"

"No," standing up in great agitation. "And I wish to heavens he had not come!"

"Leave him to me, and I'll soon send him about his business;" and the General walked out of the room, with a ferocious expression on his sunburnt face; whilst the girl, utterly overcome, threw herself down on the sofa, and sobbed aloud—great tearless sobs, from a heart that was nearly breaking. How could she bear to face her life, if the present were to be the picture of the future! Dudley, the man she loved, close within reach, yet separated from her by a barrier of her own making! Lushington, the man she feared, whether near or far, bound to her by a tie which, for honour's sake, she dared not break! One she could have followed alone and unprotected to the farthest ends of the earth without fear for her spotless innocence; whilst as to the other, she knew but little of him, and an instinct told her that she could not trust that little. One was the soul of honour, and even a stranger would have felt it safe to trust him, after one look into his honest eyes; the other might be, only it was not written in indelible characters across his face, that all might read.

Wentworth had been for a year the perfect realization of her girlish ideal, Lushington only a passing fancy, born of vanity and caprice; and yet, through her own unmitigated folly, and a boy's treachery, she must turn her eyes for ever from the one, and give her hand and pledged troth to the other. Was ever any girl so utterly miserable before?

"Sibel, where are you? Such a lark!" and Phil crept noiselessly into the room. "Hullo!" catching sight of the limp form on the sofa.

"Are you ill—is anything up?"

"No," sitting up, and brushing back her hair "only everything's gone wrong."

"Gone wrong! Poor little Belle," patting her on the back, as he sat down on the head of the sofa. "Never mind, it will be all right in a second. Trust Lushington for that! I say, you should have seen him."

"Why did you take away the ladder?" suddenly remembering the anxiety it had caused her.

"Because Wentworth came down the drive. He nearly caught us as it was. Lushington was to come here first, and make it all right with the governor, then the other was to walk in and support him, supposing the governor turned crusty; but it was all upset by Lushington's wanting to have a spoon with you. How he managed to get out of the room, with both of you standing there, I can't conceive; but the best of it is in groping his way through the house, he pitched headfirst into the governor's bath, and made such a deuce of a row that I ran upstairs to see what had happened. Priscilla came too, but I just managed to get the Major out of sight down the backstairs, and through the back door into the stables, where I gave him a good rubbing down. You should have seen him, he did look such an idiot! All the while it was getting so awfully late, that when he was ready, he didn't half like going in, and Wentworth being here first, made it so awkward. But he was going to make proper apologies, and swear he was delayed by falling into a place of water, which the governor was to take for the duck-pond, though how any one could get into it, on his way from the Chase, might have puzzled a wiser brain. Look here, Belle, you haven't laughed once, and I've been splitting my sides! What's the matter? Aren't all settled?"

She leant her face on her hand and did not answer.

"I say it's hard lines to keep it from me, when I've god-fathered the whole business."

"It's nothing to be proud of."

"Isn't it, though? Upon my word, I think it is. All the Woolwich girls will go raving mad to hear of it. Isn't anything better than being screwed up here like a convict?"

"Don't talk to me—I can't bear it!"

"Hallo!" jumping off the sofa. "That's all the thanks I get for a regular Romeo and Juliet romance! Won't you try my hand at it again, and next time you want a lover on a ladder, you must get them elsewhere!"

With a nod he left the room, feeling decidedly ill-used. The sentiment in his nature was still dominant, and until it was roused by his own personal experience, he looked upon marriage as a promise institution, where the only things necessary for happiness were a fairly good-looking face, without a squint or a small-pox mark, and a fortune sufficient for mutual wants and pleasures. From this point of view he thought that any injury he had done to his cousin by that unfortunate valentine was more than repaid by the match that seemed likely to be the consequence of it. On the face of things it was infinitely more desirable to be the bride of a fascinating out-and-out good fellow like Lushington, than to be badgered and bullied as if she were a penniless dependent by an uncle who, to put it mildly, did not get on with her. Yes, he deserved to be patted on the back, after all the trouble he had taken, and he only got snubbed for his pains. Great shame, but girls are the most unreasonable things on earth. Jumping down the stairs two or three steps at a time, he nearly encountered against his father, and drew back as if he had touched a nettle.

Not a smile relaxed the General's stern countenance.

"Tell your cousin that I wish to speak to her in the library."

But made a face, and ran upstairs again, breathlessly. "Governor wants you," he said, laconically.

"Not downstairs!" and Sibel recoiled as if in horror, her mind instantly conjuring up the possibility of a meeting with Dudley Wentworth. To see him now would be worse than death.

"Yes, instantly. Just put your hair straight, for it's tumbling about anyhow," he added, with

an anxious look at her tangled curls. "It looks, you know, as if somebody had been rumpling it, or you had been to sleep in it, quite enough to put the governor in no end of a wax."

She turned to the looking-glass, and, dismayed by her own untidiness, ran into her bedroom, bathed her eyes, powdered her tear-stained cheeks, and smoothed her hair; anything to gain time. Phil gave her an approving glance when she came back.

"That's better. Do you know, Belle, you are a stunner. No wonder, Judith is jealous of you."

She took no notice of his remark, but walked slowly down the passage, her heart beating so loud that she could scarcely hear anything else. Sounds of several voices came from the drawing-room, and the door opened just as she was in the act of passing it.

"I think I left it in the pocket of my coat," Mrs. Forrester, said the voice she loved better than any other on earth, and in a moment she was face to face with Dudley Wentworth.

He stood still, drawing a deep breath; then becoming conscious of the eyes that watched him, he conquered his own inclination to pass on, and stretched out his hand.

"It is ages since we met," and he smiled, as if he were glad the ages were over.

As their hands touched Sibel turned deathly white. She longed to ask him question after question, but her tongue was tied—and how could she have spoken with Judith and the rest to listen! One wild imploring look, in which her heart tried to speak in plain, unmistakable English, and then she drew her hand away, and, with a sob in her throat, reached the library door; whilst he, utterly bewildered by that look, turned back into the drawing room, and quite forgot the book which he had come out to fetch.

Could there be any mistake about her fancy for Lushington? No, utterly impossible, after her asking him to meet her at midnight on the Knoll. Still his perfect confidence in his previous convictions was shaken, and his mind wandered so much from the conversation during the rest of the evening that Judith asked him abruptly if he had a headache.

"Yes, a headache, the result of ill-temper. Don't pity me, for I quite deserve it."

"I think you have enough to upset you," she said, with infinite compassion; her usually impassive face lighting up into sudden warmth.

"I have a thousand times more than you know of," he said, gravely. "But I have no right to be savage. A man ought to conquer his troubles, and not let them conquer him."

"I am sure no one could bear them more nobly!" she murmured, gently.

"How can you tell?" opening his eyes. "I am not likely to make my mean in public."

"This is like your second home."

"Thanks, you are most kind. I want to forget I ever had a home, and not to find another."

He rose from his seat as he spoke, as if he were afraid that she had already produced her scissors for the purpose of clipping his wings. The idea was ridiculous, but he had never seen Judith Forrester look so before, and it gave him an unpleasant sensation.

Evidently it was a good thing that he was soon about to start for India, and that miles of land and water would soon lie between himself and the inmates of Coombe Lodge.

CHAPTER XI.

"FASTENING THE FETTERS."

WHEN Sibel opened the library door General Forrester was standing on the hearthrug with his back towards her, whilst Major Lushington leant against the mantelpiece on the opposite side. He came forward at once, his eyes glowing as they fixed themselves in eager love upon the pale, sad little face of the girl who had bewitched him.

"Miss Fitzgerald," he said, bending low over her hand, "I have come to claim your promise."

She only bowed, with the ghost of a smile, feeling like a victim prepared for the sacrifice.

"Sibel, I consider it was due to me, as well as to yourself, to inform me that you had entered into an engagement with this gentleman," said her uncle, sternly; "in fact, you had no right to enter into any engagement whatever without my sanction."

"You must excuse me, sir, but I was so eager to have it settled that I allowed her no time to think."

"If you consider that a proper way of proceeding, I don't," trying to look down his nose at the Major, who, unfortunately, was several inches taller than himself.

"Not proper, perhaps," with a slight smile, "but very natural. I am here to-night, at great personal inconvenience, in order to go through all the necessary formalities, and Wentworth has been kind enough to come with me, so that if you want anyone to vouch for my respectability, drawing himself up proudly, "you can have the word of a gentleman. I am an adventurer, and I have nothing to be ashamed of, except such weaknesses as men of my class are apt to indulge in."

"In other words," broke in the General, angrily, "your army men of the present day are a dis-solute lot."

The Major shrugged his shoulders. "Some of us are a bad lot, but there are heaps of exceptions."

"But you, according to your own confession, are not amongst them."

"Excuse me. I do not step up for a saint, neither am I an utterly disreputable sinner. A woman's instinct in these matters is infallible. If Miss Fitzgerald can trust me, surely you have no reason to doubt?"

"Pshaw! the child knows nothing of you, and has simply lost her heart to the first man she came across."

"Not the first, for I might have had a dangerous rival in Wentworth," with a mischievous smile, for he knew the speech would have its sting.

"Wentworth knows little or nothing of my niece, although he has been intimate with my family ever since his childhood; in fact, Judith and he were like brother and sister."

"A short acquaintance would scarcely have seemed a safeguard to me; but we are keeping Miss Fitzgerald waiting. Am I, or am I not, to be the happiest man in England!" turning to her with his most winning smile, as he took her little hand in his. It was cold, and he fancied that it was trembling.

"Not with my consent, until she is twenty-one."

To the girl it seemed like a promise of release, and she drew a deep breath of relief. To the Major it seemed like a threat of utter loss, and his eyes blazed with sudden anger.

"On what plea?"

"My niece is too young to decide on such matters for the present," and the General folded his arms.

"That is no reason why we should wait three years. Anything might happen between now and then," a thunder-cloud on his brow.

"Yes, anything," repeated the General, in an irritating manner, "even a change of mind."

"Never! Never, so long as life lasts."

"You forget that there are two people concerned in the matter. Do you imagine from what you have seen of my niece that constancy is her principal virtue?"

The Major winced, for he remembered a great difference between the way in which Sibel had treated him at Woolwich, and the manner in which she had received him at Coombe Lodge, but he answered loyally.

"I think she has every virtue under the sun."

"I suppose so," drawing in his lips, "and I hope you will never be disillusioned. I cannot say that I have implicit confidence in either of you. Sibel has behaved with the grossest indiscretion, and I conclude that you have encouraged her."

"Uncle," her chest heaving; "Major Lushington knows—"

"More than I do!" with a sneer. "I know

that I should only be too glad to shift the responsibility of taking care of you for the future from my shoulders to his."

"I am only too ready!" and the Major drew Sibel gently towards him. "Give her to me now, and I shall be proud to call her my wife."

"But how long would it last? No, Major Lushington," shaking his head, "it would be an easy way of getting out of my difficulties, but when I see my duty clearly I am not one to shirk it. When married, I should have no more control over her at all, and I cannot trust her to go on without. If it were Judith—"

"Defend me!" murmured the Major beneath his moustaches.

"If it were Judith I should have no doubt; but Sibel is young for her years, and, I say it all in kindness, not as discreet as I could wish."

"Ugh, this is not fair!" her cheeks flaming. "Never mind, dearest, I have perfect faith in you."

"Perfect faith! Fiddlers!" exclaimed the General, impatiently. "Time to talk of that when you've been married for ten years."

"I can talk of it now," said Lushington, firmly; "but before I go, I wish to know how we stand. Miss Fitzgerald has promised to marry me, and I intend her to be my wife. When she is twenty-one I need ask no consent but her own. Have you the cruelty to say we must wait till then?"

"There shall be no engagement for the present."

"You can't say that, when she has given me her promise. Whatever happens, the engagement will stand."

"But she had no right to give you that promise," glaring at the poor girl, who looked as if she must drop on the carpet, as she stood with her graceful neck drooping, and her eyes cast on the ground.

"But I have it!" his eyes gleaming with triumph, "and no man shall take it from me. Sibel, tell him that you mean to be true to me," throwing his arm round her shrinking form, as if to proclaim his right.

She looked from one to the other, with a hunted expression in her pitiful eyes. Lushington's seemed to compel her to answer. "I have promised," she said, hoarsely.

"Then you may take your promise back," exclaimed the General, wrathfully. "I will have no talk of marriage for years to come."

"Stay, sir," said the Major, quietly, although his face was white with passion; "only a few minutes ago you said that Miss Fitzgerald through her kindness to me was disgraced for life. I think it is an exaggerated view, and I do not hold with it, but as you do, you must abide by it, and in that case marriage is the only remedy. This is what I have to propose. Let the engagement be announced in the papers at once, and leave the date of the marriage uncertain for the present. That is the only arrangement to which I can consent, if there is to be a delay at all."

"Really you are very good," in a tone of the bitterest irony. "You dictate your terms, as if the right to consent or refuse were on your side, not mine," and the General bit his lip, not at all approving of the way in which the tables had been turned upon him.

"I have the right upon my side at all events."

"If the affair had been kept quiet—"

"But it has not been kept quiet!"

"In my day it would not have been thought honourable to let out a woman's secret." "I did not let it out, that I swear. Dearest, believe me," turning to Sibel, "the only man I mentioned it to was Wentworth, and that was when I appealed to him for advice, as a last resource."

"Why—why did you do it?" "Because I was in such a fix—not knowing what was best for you."

"Uncle, mayn't I go? You cannot want me any longer."

General Forrester looked at the white imploring face, and a spasm of compassion seemed to place the crust of his heart. Some resemblance of his brother, Sir Edward, the gallant, warm-hearted soldier, crossed his mind, and he

wondered what he would say to the woe-begone face of his child—so young—so fair, and yet so unutterably sad. Perhaps a father might have understood the girl—she was quite beyond him. Giving her up as a hopeless problem, he turned to the Major.

There was no mistaking his eagerness, which was patent to the most careless eye. He was certainly in love with Sibel, and if she did not care for him to the same extent, at least the engagement would silence every tongue, and keep the girl out of Wentworth's way.

"Very well, Major Lushington," he said, gravely, "it shall be as you will, and you may announce to all the world, if you like, that you are engaged to my niece."

"I thank you, General, from the bottom of my heart," and the artilleryman grasped the old man's hand, his eyes shining with delight. "Believe me, you shall never have cause to regret your kindness."

"Say the same to my niece—that is of more consequence."

"I can. My darling, the love of a life-time shall be yours," he raised her cold hands to his lips, and wondered at their coldness. "You shall never want a friend to defend you, and you shall never shed a tear that I can help."

Then he stooped and pressed a passionate kiss on her unwilling lips, as if to seal his rights, and raising his head looked at the General defiantly.

Sibel moved slowly to the door, feeling as if she were in a dream; Lushington followed and held it open for her, bending down as she passed him to whisper, "Write to me as soon as you can."

She tried to smile, but her lips seemed to be paralysed, so she bent her head without a word, and went down the hall past the drawing-room door. Wentworth was saying, "Yes, Mrs. Forrester, as soon as I settle my father at 'The Chestnuts' I shall have to start for India."

Pray Heaven that he might be gone before she arrived!

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD-BYE TO THE LODGE.

THERE was a flutter of excitement when the news of Sibel's engagement spread through the house. Phil's congratulations were the most hearty because he thought Major Lushington a capital fellow, but Judith's were equally sincere because it pleased her to think that Sibel's attractions would no longer be dangerous in the matrimonial market.

Rose wished her joy, but looked as if she thought the joy was doubtful. Mrs. Forrester sighed, and said she hoped Major Lushington would make a good husband, rather as if she imagined that the artilleryman was a regular Don Juan.

Sibel was no longer banished from the rest of the family, although she could not understand why, if she were supposed to have done wrong, the engagement should have absolved her. She made the school-room her chief sitting-room, but as her meals no longer came upstairs, she was obliged to go downstairs to eat them.

General Forrester, by his wife's advice, advanced a quarter's allowance, in order that his niece's toilette might be put in order, and both Sibel and the maid were very busy in making the necessary preparations for her lengthy visit.

Work was a relief to her, for it helped to banish thought, and she piled her needles industriously as if she had been born a sempstress. Rose offered her help, but was apt to chat, whilst her work lay idly in her lap, and Phil looked on with a tendency to grumble at everything under the sky.

He was disgusted at losing Sibel, whom he was wont to consider at intervals, either as his torment or his blessing; disgusted at the part he had played in the affair, disgusted at the thought that a comparative stranger had been forced to offer her a home, because his father chose to turn her out of the house.

"When Hugh is at home for the vacation, I hope they will ask me over to 'The Chestnuts,'" he said, abruptly, as he sat on the school-room

table swinging his legs, whilst Sibel's brown head was bent over her work.

"I don't know that you would like it. It will be very different to the Chase—quite a small place, without boating, fishing, or shooting."

"It would be better than this, anyhow."

"I should think you would find it very dull, with only an old man, Hugh, and me."

"Let them ask me, and you shall see."

"Why, Phil," looking up in surprise, "there would be nothing to do!"

"At any rate, I could tease you."

"So you might, but you would get tired of it."

"Not so tired as I shall be of moping here all by myself. Did you know that Wentworth was coming here to-night to bid them all good-bye?"

"No," bending still lower over her face.

"When did you see him?"

"At the railway-station, when I sent off that parcel for the governor. Most of his luggage was there—such a heap, as big as a woman's trousseau! I never saw such a fellow for business. He has arranged everything here as well as at the other place; settled his father's affairs as well as his own; cut down the expenses, sold the horses, and is much readier to start than most people would be who had had nothing else to think of."

"Does he go down to Berkshire with us to-morrow?" in a muffled voice.

"No, he's off by six o'clock in the morning. He was awfully sorry, but he could not manage it."

"It seems a pity," with a deep sigh.

That evening Sibel pleaded the excuse of a bad headache and remained upstairs; but as she lay on the sofa with throbbing temples, her ears were acutely alive to every sound after the front door-bell rang, and she heard Dudley Wentworth's footstep in the hall.

It was better—far better—that she should not see him; it was by her own free will that she stayed upstairs, but her heart seemed as if it would bound out of her breast when she heard his voice, and she held fast to the side of the sofa as if her rebellious muscles would have taken her out of the room against her will.

This would have been the mockery of a good-bye, a pair of cold hands meeting across a gulf, a pair of averted eyes not daring to meet lest the truth should flash out of them, and make all pretences useless.

No, to have another good-bye like that when they parted at the gate she would gladly have given ten years of her life, and thought it wondrous cheap at the price; but not for this, with Judith's curious eyes fixed upon her, and that strange cold look upon his face that she had seen at the door of the church.

She lay there trembling at the thought of his presence in the house, unable to fix her mind on anything else so long as he was so near that with the smallest effort of her will she could see him.

At nine o'clock he came, and she gave him two hours for all his parting speeches, but in less than half the drawing-room door opened, and she heard his voice once more in the hall.

For one instant the mad thought crossed her mind that he was coming upstairs, and her heart stood still. "But no, he was only stopping to put on his overcoat, and the whole family seemed to be watching the process."

"Well, good-bye, Wentworth!" said the General, in his double bass. "We shall miss the bay mare at the cover-alls."

"Not so much as I shall miss the friends I leave behind." That clear ringing tone, when would she hear it again! "Good-bye to you all."

Then the door shut with a sullen clang, which seemed to find its echo in her breast, and he was gone—gone from her life like the sunlight from the day, when night throws her black mantle over the earth.

She closed her eyes, and lay quite still, without a tear on her lashes or a sigh on her lips. A sudden calm came over her which was nothing less than first cousin to despair.

Presently she crept away to her bed anxious

to escape Phil, whose step was already on the stairs. She could not talk to him or to Rose, and she could not listen to what Dudley had looked, or said, or forgotten to say. She was better away from them all, alone with her sorrowful heart.

The next morning the grand carriage from the Chase, with the coronet on the panels and the high-stepping horses working distraction to the gravel, stopped at the door to pick up Miss Fitzgerald; and she came down the stairs of Coombe Lodge for the last time.

Mrs Forrester wept over her niece, feeling true compassion for the lonely girl whom her husband had turned out of the house. She never had the strength of mind to oppose him, but whilst she bent to his hard will she let many bitter tears fall at the same time.

"Good-bye, my child!" she said, with more affection than she had ever shown before. "May Heaven bless you, and make you happy!"

"Good-bye, Sibel," and Judith deposited a prim kiss on the low white forehead. "I am sure I hope you will be able to get on with Lord Wentworth."

"Oh, dear!" cried Rose, flinging her arms round her cousin's neck, "what shall we do without you!"

"Come, come, Lord Wentworth must not be kept waiting!" said the General, impatiently.

Sibel gently detached the clinging arms, and after a loving kiss on the tear-stained cheeks, stretched out her hand to Phil.

He took it, looking rather foolish, for like a boy he was ashamed of showing the slightest emotion, and for the life of him he could not keep his lip from trembling. Then he ducked his head, and kissed her cheek, mumbling, "See you again, some day, old girl!"

Then she was handed into the carriage, and there was only time for a shake of the hands, through the window, with the General before they drove off. Then, for the first time, Sibel spied Hugh curled up on the opposite seat.

"I beg your pardon; but I really did not know you were there!" holding out her hand, which the boy held tight for half a minute.

"You saw Phil plain enough!"

"Yes, that was natural. I had to say good-bye to him!"

"And only 'how d'ye do' to me, so I was of no consequence!" his large dark eyes under the thick shelter of their long, silken lashes looking sullen and resentful.

"Why, Hugh, you are forgetting your manners!" said Lord Wentworth, reprovingly. "How can you tell a young lady to her face that you would rather it be 'good-bye' than 'how d'ye do'?"

"I never did. I swear I never did!" excitedly.

"You seemed to infer it!"

"Sibel knows what I mean," looking at her appealingly. "If I had been in Phil's place I couldn't have stood it!"

"An Englishman must stand anything!" she said, with a smile. "If Phil had cried I should have been ashamed of him!"

"And I, if I had made a fool of myself I shouldn't have shown it! When I say good-bye to you, you shall kiss me as you did Phil, and if my cheeks are wet—I forbid you to laugh!"

"Phil is my cousin, I think. You are mad today, Hugh!"

"And if I am, it is no wonder! I am leaving every friend I have, except the best!" with a bow to those before him.

"But you are of an age when every new year brings a fresh stock of friends," said the old man, with a touch of sadness in his voice. "To you change is natural, to me almost intolerable."

Sibel gave a shy look of admiration at the noble face beside her. It was calm, and composed, and no one would have guessed to look at it that its owner had just been through the terrible ordeal of quitting for the last time the home of his fathers.

"You—you bear everything so nobly!" said the boy, in a choked voice, and relapsed into silence.

The rest of the journey was performed without mishap. Lord Wentworth's man, London, took

all the trouble off his master's hands, and Hugh Macdonald bought a heap of newspapers and books for the general benefit.

About four o'clock in the afternoon they reached Thornfield station, and found the brougham, one of the carriages which Lord Wentworth had decided to retain, waiting for them.

After driving through some pretty lanes, which were scarcely broad enough to be designated as roads, and passing through one beechwood after another, they turned in at the gate of the Chestnuts.

Not a word was spoken as they drove up the neatly-kept drive with ivy-grown banks on each side, which in summer time the golden St. John's wort liked to spangle with ivy stars. There was a rustic porch over the door, but Sibel saw nothing of the pleasant verandahs and gabled windows, for on the steps Dudley Wentworth was standing, with a smile on his lips to gladden his father's heart.

(To be continued.)

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

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CHAPTER X.

AND SO—all unwitting of Herbert's Cecil's interest in her—all innocent of any attempt to win his love—yet the beautiful, lonely girl contrived to make herself the dearest thing on earth to the grave, scholarly man who had believed it in his power to go through the world unscathed by the darts of Cupid's archery.

The surrender was very swift. Three weeks after that first meeting he knew the truth that for him there was but one woman. If Mr. D'Arcy's lovely niece refused him, his life would lose its crowning joy.

His love knocked down all barriers, conquered all prejudices. He was a proud man, and he knew the D'Arcys sprang from nothing. He was a literary man, and ought to have married someone with grand connections to advance his talents; but neither pride nor worldly wisdom could stand before a stronger passion. He would have given up the whole world to possess that little hand; and each time he came to Colville-road he resolved to risk all and try his fate, but the opportunity he sought was long in coming.

At last fortune favoured him one dull, November afternoon. He called at the little house which contained his treasure, and was greeted by the servant with—"Missus has just gone out, sir, and master won't be home till late."

"Is Miss D'Arcy at home?"

"She's in the parlour, sir."

Herbert entered abruptly—a strange mixture of hope and fear struggling in his breast. He knew that Beatrice D'Arcy, with her talent and beauty, could expect a far higher position than he might offer her. He knew that to many a girl a stage life offered many charms, only he fancied she had never treated him quite as a stranger. From the very first there had been a secret, mysterious bond of sympathy between them; and he believed, if she would only give herself to him, he could make her happy—for he knew she was not happy now. Sweet and affectionate as was her manner to Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy, she still seemed out of her proper place in the little house in Colville-road. She always had a strange, yearning look of expectation in her beautiful eyes—a far off, dreamy expression in their azure depths which placed Herbert's heart as though with an arrow, and yet struck him with a bewildering sense of familiarity.

She was sitting in a low chair by the fire, dressed in a plain blue serge—her thoughts evidently far away. She half started on Mr. Cecil's entrance.

"Did I frighten you?" he asked her, with that peculiar ring of tenderness in his voice true men only use towards one woman—the one they hope to make their own.

"A little!" returned the girl, simply.

"Uncle and aunt are both out, and it is a wet day; I thought no one would come. I believe I had lost myself in a day dream."

He smiled.

"I hope it was a pleasant one. Were you dreaming of the brilliant success everyone predicts for you in the spring?"

She shook her head.

"I was thinking of the past. Mr. Cecil, do you think anyone is ever perfectly happy?"

"What a question! Very few people, I fear; but, at least, I hope you will be of their number. You should be if I had the ruling of the future!"

"You are very kind to me!"

"Who would not be kind to you, Beatrice!" using her Christian name almost unconsciously to his earnestness. "Are you quite set upon this stage plan? Will nothing turn you from it?"

"I love music for its own sake," returned the girl, slowly; "and my voice is all I have. I think I would rather sing than do anything."

"Then it is simply for art's sake, not for love of fame. It is not the flattery of an idle crowd the feverish excitement of the footlights and the glare of the stage, that draws you?"

"I want to have something to fill up my life," she said, raising her blue eyes to his face. "I am only nineteen—hardly that. I cannot spend my life without some aim or object."

"And so you have made fame your idol?"

"I want to succeed for my uncle's sake—for my own. So that I can sing—so that I am not a burden to uncle and aunt—I do not mind."

"Fame is a hard mistress."

"And yet you woo her, too!"

"Fame is for a man," he said, sternly. "A woman should be satisfied with love!"

He could see the tears shining in her eyes.

"If a woman has love she wants nothing else!" said Beatrice, simply. "I would blame a woman who loved and was beloved, and yet sought something beyond, as harshly as you could do."

"Beatrice!"

The very sound of his voice told her what was coming. She longed to stay him, but it was too late. She could only sit trembling, with her hands locked nervously together while he poured out his story—the story of a true man's love, which she was yet powerless to gratify.

"My darling!" Herbert cried—his reserve melting before that beautiful face—"I have loved you ever since I saw you. I am not a rich man, but I can give my wife an easeful home. If you will only trust yourself to me, Beatrice, I will make you happy!"

No answer; but he could see her breast heaving with sobe, and he did not despair.

"I am asking a great deal," he went on, tenderly. "With your beauty, with your voice, I doubt not all London will be at your feet—riches, titles, and honours will be offered. I have nothing but my love; only, Beatrice, it is so true and intense, so strong and fervent, that I believe it would make up to you for all."

She put out one of her hands—those thin, white, taper fingers—and laid it on his arm.

"Don't say any more. I thank you again and again. But, oh! it can never be!"

"Are you quite sure, Beatrice? I would wait so patiently, my darling. I would teach you to love me in time, my sweetest!"

She was crying bitterly.

"I wish I had never been born!" she moaned. "You have been so good to me. I liked you so much. I was so grateful for your friendship. And oh! I never thought of this!"

With the instinct of a noble nature he put away his own grief to comfort her.

"It was not your fault. How should you guess my folly—a child like you! And yet, Heaven help me, I was mad enough to think you cared for me!"

"I do care!" said the girl, gently. "As a friend I love you dearly; so dearly that I will not take you at your word, and come to you without giving you my whole heart."

"But in time!" he urged. "If you care for me a little surely in time—"

"I shall never care for anyone like that!"

answered the girl, a crimson blush flushing her face. "I shall never feel as you would wish. Never, while I live!"

An instinct told Herbert she spoke the truth, but he was loth to believe it.

"In time!" he pleaded. "If I go away and return when you have grown used to the idea! I spoke to you too suddenly to-day, and frightened you with my vehemence."

Beatrice, for all answer raised the hand she still held and pressed her lips to it. Then, gaining courage from the mute caress, she said,—

"I shall never change—never while I live. Turn your head away from me, Mr. Cecil. Don't look at me while I tell you of my miserable folly, and you shall know why."

He obeyed her. There was a perfect silence in the room—you might have heard a pin drop.

"There are a great many sorts of love," began Beatrice at last; "and some people say that second love is stronger than first. I do not know how it would be with others—I can only judge myself. My heart can hold but one love; it is all over and done with—a story of the past, and yet, while I live, that love will live too!"

He turned towards her. The blush had faded now; she was paler even than usual, but there was no trace of embarrassment on her face. As he looked at the pure, white brow, the world of feeling shining in the blue eyes, Herbert knew she had spoken the truth; and a great regret for the happiness he had mislaid filled his heart even at the moment when he realised that for all time her answer to him would be the same.

"Poor child!" he said, with deep emotion, "I never thought of this. I never imagined once that your heart was buried with the dead!"

She forced herself to contradict his last words. "He is not dead," she said, slowly. "It is only he found out his mistake in time. He did not care for me as he thought!"

Never a suspicion of her identity with Dora Clifford came to Herbert. He only marvelled how any man could have acted so basely.

"Not care for you!" he murmured. "Not care for you!"

"It is all over now," said Beatrice, with a smile of rare sweetness. "We have gone our different ways. He has, I believe, a beautiful wife beside him, and I—I have my art. You will not misjudge me now; you will believe I enter my profession not from envy of fame, or greed for public applause, but because my life is empty. For all time it must be a lonely one, and I would fill it with busy work and active interests to help me to bear its void."

"I thought you a child!" said Herbert, hoarsely.

"And I am a woman! Ah! but a sorrow of that kind kills one's childhood quickly. Don't think me gloomy or disappointed, Mr. Cecil," she said, with her own bright smile. "I have plenty of happiness in my life. I have only told you this to prove how impossible it is for me to feel as you wish."

"And you make my disappointment all the keener for showing me what I have lost. Oh! Beatrice, it will be hard work to give you up—to resign all hope."

"You have plenty left to hope for!" said the girl, bravely. "With talents like yours your fame is only a question of time. You will find someone to share that fame—someone who can give you her whole heart, and till then—"

"The till then will be to my life's end!" he interrupted her gloomily.

"Till then I will be your friend—you shall tell me your joys and sorrows. I will sympathise in your success, and feel for your failure. Until another love fills your life I offer you my friendship."

He bent over the little hand and kissed it. "I will try and be worthy of the boon. I am leaving town soon—to-morrow, I think. I could not bear to see you just yet. When I return I shall have not forgotten my wishes, but conquered my wild regret. In a little while, long before your debut, I shall come to claim your promise."

"Where shall you go?" asked Beatrice, gently. "November is a gloomy month for roaming."

"I am going on a visit. Some friends of mine, Captain and Mrs. Fane, have a furnished house at Winchester, and I shall quarter myself on them."

"Is there a Miss Fane?"

"Two—but they are under six. No, Beatrice, I am not so mad as to woo another to cure my heart of the pain you have inflicted. I would rather have your friendship than another's love. Do you know I had thought to go through my life unsmothered! I have seen so many men wrecked through what the world calls love that I meant to steer clear of it."

"I wish you had!"

"I do not wish it myself! I would rather feel the pain I do now than have lost the pleasure of knowing you. I never felt an interest in any woman's face before except a little uncultivated school-girl's, and my feeling for her was only pity, poor child!"

"Did she die?" wondering if he were alluding to her own story.

"It would have been better if she had! No; she left her home, and no news of her has ever reached her friends."

"Perhaps she was untappy!" moved to the defence of the nameless heroine.

"She was heart-broken. Do not think I am blaming her; she was the victim of a man's wandering fancy, and the wiles of as wicked a coquette as ever breathed."

"Do not speak so bitterly!"

"I feel bitterly on the subject. Do not think I was one of the victims—I was merely a looker-on! I saw my friend—the dearest friend I had—dishonoured and disgraced!"

Beatrice looked her interest, and he went on:

"Ah! you pity me because I love a good woman and cannot win her; but he deserves more pity still. He sacrificed his honour, his sense of right, his every principle; and then, when poverty set in, he was dismissed like a discarded toy."

"Where is he?"

"He, Alan!"—the name escaping him in forgetfulness—"travelling abroad, and she has made a brilliant match—horses, carriages, jewels. In that case certainly the wicked triumphed."

They had both risen—he was loth to go. There was to him a and pleasure in that lingering farewell. Never more could he stand at Miss D'Arcy's side as her lover. He must not see her again until he could accept the friendship she offered him.

Her hand was in his—those wonderful blue eyes were raised to his face—the strength of the temptation almost overcame him.

"May I?" he whispered. Then as she bowed her head in assent he pressed his lips to hers. But there was no hope—no triumph in that embrace. It was the seal of the past—it was drawing the curtain on the most sacred chamber of his heart. That kiss had in it all the sadness which a lover feels when he presses his lips for the last time to the fair, cold cheek of his dead fiancée.

The door closed on him. Beatrice D'Arcy, the musician's niece, disappeared; in her place sat Dora Clifford, Lord St. Clare's sometime betrothed. The girl put one hand to her head and tried to collect her thoughts; but, alas! the task was too much for her. In spite of Herbert Cecil's disappointment and her pity at causing it. She could realize but one idea—Alan was free! for Blanche Delaval had bestowed her beauty on another.

CHAPTER XI.

THE days passed rather heavily in Colville-road after Herbert Cecil's farewell. He had been such a constant visitor that last month—the little family had grown so accustomed to his presence—that they missed him at every turn. Mr. D'Arcy deplored his loss more than anyone; for Michael had a keen perception, and guessing the subject was a painful one for his adopted niece, avoided it adroitly.

But his wife had no such scruples. She loved

Beatrice, as she called her, dearly, but she had not the refinement of feeling to make her understand there are some topics too delicate for discussion. She rallied the girl good-humouredly on the loss of her admirer, consolingly predicting that he would soon come back, or, if not, such a pretty girl would soon pick up another beau.

For a week Michael suffered this; then, seeing his favourite grow thinner and paler every day, he interfered. Not by appealing to his wife—he knew her mistake was one of mind, not heart. He only said one morning at breakfast that he thought Beatrice wanted a change.

"Camberwell isn't the brightest place in November for a young thing. Wife, don't you think the child would be better for a little trip somewhere? We want to keep up our prima donna's health and spirits, you know, or what would Mr. Gordon have to say?"

Mrs. D'Arcy dropped the piece of sausage she was transferring from her fork to her lips, put the fork down, and gave Dora a sharp but not unkindly scrutiny.

"I can't think where my eyes have been! Why you're just the colour of a mealy potato, child! What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, aunty; I am quite well!"

"She wants a change," repeated the musician; "and she won't be able to get it later on when she is busy at rehearsals."

Mrs. D'Arcy seemed struck with a sudden idea.

"Let's send her down to my sister. The kindest soul in the world, Beatrice; she lives in a pretty little village—her husband's the station-master. It's not a grand place, but they'd welcome you heartily."

Dora hesitated.

"I am very happy here," she said, slowly. "I shouldn't like to thrust myself on strangers."

"Strangers!" and Mrs. D'Arcy laughed.

"Why, Beattie would be hurt! How can my niece be a stranger to my sister! I had a letter from her only the other day, envying me for having a young thing like you to keep me company."

"There, let's call it settled," decided Michael. "You write to Beattie, and we'll turn this naughty child out bag and baggage, if she won't go of her own accord."

Mrs. D'Arcy was a very prompt person, and letter-writing was a great undertaking to her. She therefore retired to the front parlour to indite her epistle as soon as breakfast was over.

D'Arcy lingered. There are some men—very few I grant you—in whom the instinct of fatherhood is so strong that they see, with a woman's keenness, where their children are concerned.

The musician loved Dora dearly. He went up to her and put one hand on her shoulder.

"It is better so, my dear," he said, affectionately. "If you stay away a fortnight or so my wife will have forgotten to remark upon Mr. Cecil's absence."

Dora winced.

"You mustn't think—" she began.

"I don't think anything about it. I will ask you one question, and then the subject shall be at rest for ever. I know Cecil too well to believe he trifled with you. Did you send him away because you believed yourself bound to adopt the stage to please me?"

"No!"

"You are quite sure!"

"Yes! And that you are the kindest friend an orphan ever had. But you have got me on your hands for life, Uncle Mike; you will never get rid of me in the way you mean."

"You be a good child and go off to my wife's sister. Without wishing to hurt Camberwell's feelings, the milk and eggs of this locality might be improved. You'll have plenty of country food at Vale."

"Where is Vale?"

"I never knew much geography, Beatrice. It's somewhere between here and Dover—half-way, I should think."

A big, broad-shouldered man with a long beard greeted Beatrice enthusiastically when she

stepped on to the little rustic platform at Vale, and himself escorted her to a low-roofed, white house opposite the station, where a pleasant-faced woman, very unlike Mrs. D'Arcy, kissed her and told her she should love her very much for her sister's sake.

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were a well-to-do, childless couple, and they made much of their young visitor.

Beatrice soon felt at home. It was quite a new life for her. Her hostess taught her to make cakes and pastry. Her host borrowed books for her from the nearest town. In return she sang the old ballads they admired, in a voice which seemed to them like angels' music.

There was no piano in the house, but that mattered nothing; singing was a second nature now to Beatrice D'Arcy. As she sat at work, as she moved about the house, she sang almost unconsciously.

She had been at Vale a week when the village was terrified by a railway accident.

Several people were killed, many more were injured, and removed to their own homes or the nearest hospital; and Mr. Johnson, from sheer goodwill more than any thought of gain, brought one of the worst sufferers to occupy the second spare room, and enjoy a chance of recovery under the devoted care of the station-master's wife.

For two or three days the shadow of death lay over the cottage. Its inmates knew nothing of their guest.

He was a Mr. Clare, and he had come from abroad. That much his luggage testified, but no more information could be gleaned. No one came to ask for him—no one wrote. Mrs. Johnson, who spent nearly all her time in the sick room, told Beatrice he had the bravest face she had ever seen.

Meanwhile, Beatrice was becoming quite a notable housewife. She attended to Mr. Johnson's comfort and the welfare of the family generally, and had proved herself quite a treasure; when one day the mistress of the dwelling came downstairs with tears in her motherly eyes.

"He has recovered his senses. And only think, Beatrice, he won't let me send for anyone—won't tell me who I may write to!"

"Is he very ill, and does he look very dreadful?"

She had been carefully screened from any sight of the sufferer.

"He seems better. I should say he had turned the corner; but we can't tell that till the doctor comes. He looks very white and thin, and there's a blue bruise on his forehead. It's not so bad as father thought. There'll be no wife or heirs to grieve if the worst happens."

"You are just tired out!" said Beatrice, with playful authority. "Now you are just to sit down in that chair and have a nap. I will take my work and go up to Mr. Clare."

But a sense of the proprieties troubled Mrs. Johnson.

"You're over young, my dear, to be a stranger's nurse; besides, you're too bonny for a sick room."

The girl smiled and kissed her.

"I'm not going to let you lag yourself out for Mr. Clare. If he's asleep it can't matter who keeps watch over his slumbers."

She entered the room noiselessly, and took her seat by the fire. The curtains of the bed were drawn quite close on the side nearest to her, and she never looked towards it. She listened attentively, but the calm, regular breathing testified that the sufferer slept, and so she sat on by the fire, working.

But as the busy hours rolled on and still the sleep continued, her nimble fingers grew tired; she dropped her work and gave herself up to a reverie.

It was getting very near now to the anniversary of her first meeting with Alan. Ah! where was Alan now? Had he grown utterly reckless and hopeless since Blanche Delaval's desertion? Would he ever know that, far away, a girl's heart ached for love of him; that there was one who would willingly—ah! so willingly—have given up her life for his happiness?

The tears welled up into her blue eyes. Her day-

dream was making her sad. Forgetting where she was and with what object, to rouse herself from the despondency which seemed creeping over her, she sang.

Only a verse—a verse of that sweetest of all love songs—Sullivan's "Sweethearts," and its sad, tender refrain—

"Ah! love for a year, a week, a day,
But, alas! for the love that loves away."

Then she remembered all—the sufferer, his slumbers, and her vigil. A blush of contrition dyed her face, and she stopped singing abruptly just as a slight movement told her the invalid was awake.

She could not reach the door without pausing the bed; besides, he might come off again, and she did not wish to disturb Mrs. Johnson needlessly, so she sat still where she was, scolding herself very frankly for her forgetfulness.

But she could hear the restless movements, and at last a desire to minister to the sick man's sufferings conquered all other feelings, and she advanced to the bedside, saying, gently,—

"Do you want anything else? Shall I call my aunt?"

The words left her lips, and then she grew pale as marble, she staggered against the bed-post for support—it was he, her lover, her hero! the man whose promised wife she had once been—Alan Deane, Earl of St. Clare.

Pale and delicate from illness, careworn from sorrow and disappointment, some might have hesitated at recognizing him, but one who loved him as his cousin did could not fail. It was the man who had wooed her on that winter's morning—whom she firmly believed might have loved her but for the wiles of Blanche Delaval.

And strange, incredible as it may seem, the girl's first instinct was one of deep thankfulness, intense joy. True he was ill—true until to-day they had almost despaired of his recovery; but he was better. She could minister to him in his sufferings, could nurse him to health if it might so be; if not, could cherish the memory of his last moments all through her life!

She stood still—motionless. She had no fear of his recognizing her. If Herbert Cecil had not done so in a month of close, confidential intimacy, Alan, who had given her far less of his thoughts, would be sure not to do so! She was quite safe.

She never knew how long she stood there.

Alan began to fancy she was only the figment of a wandering brain, some beautiful vision of a dream. She did not speak—she did not move.

At last he stretched out one hand and touched her dress, as though to discover whether she was in very deed and truth a living, breathing girl.

That touch recalled her as nothing else could have done. His hand had power to bring back her scattered composure. Remembering no one need ever know her secret, she said, simply,—

"Did you want anything, sir?"—the "sir" added purposely, because she did not wish him to know she was not really the niece of his host and hostess.

"Yes," said Alan, with the feeble, lingering accents of sickness; I want to know if you are real!"

A strange smile crossed her face. He did not like it.

"I have been watching you," he said, slowly, with painful pauses, caused by want of breath. "And you were so still, you never moved, and I thought I was asleep."

"You have been to sleep, but you are wide awake now, and I am very real and human," said Beatrice, putting her cool, slim hand into his fevered one to convince him.

The hot finger closed round hers.

"I wish you would stay here," said Alan, feebly. "I am so tired, and I like to look at you."

She knew that the power of his intellect had not returned—that his fancy was nothing more than the irrational wish of a little child; and yet the request pleased her—yet the touch of those burning fingers thrilled her through and through.

"It is hard to be ill among strangers, sir," said the girl, in her sweet, low voice. "Will you not let us send for your friends? Aunt says you refused to give her their address; give it to me and let me write!"

He shook his head.

"There's no one cares. It's all over now; she has quite forgotten—Mrs. Montgomery Smith!"

"Shall I send for her? do you want her?" and the girl's voice trembled, for she guessed that it was her rival's married name.

"I want nothing," he said, feebly, "except to look at you. I think I must have known you somewhere long ago. It seems to me so, only to look at you!"

And regardless of fatigue the girl stood there that the two aching eyes might rest on her, since they found the sight soothing. And when Mrs. Johnson came up—ashamed at the length of her own slumbers—to see Beatrice free, she found her bending over the sleeping invalid, and looking not unlike a guardian angel.

The doctor declared the next day that his patient was so much better he might be now considered out of danger.

Alan, for the first time, was able to answer the good surgeon's questions, (which he did intelligently and gratefully enough. Only on one point he was firm. He would not leave Vale; though assured he could be moved safely he would not hear a mention of it.

"I have no home!" he answered, wearily. "Let me stay here, where I was brought at first. These kind people have been too good to me for them to think me a burden. I know there are some kindnesses no money can repay—their care for me is one. But the expense I must have put them to, surely they will let me compensate them for that!"

"Well, you must settle the question with Mrs. Johnson. I see you appreciate good nursing; here is the best to be met with for miles round!"

The next time his hostess appeared Alan asked his question.

"Am I in your way? Do you want to get rid of me?"

"Lord! no, sir! We shouldn't go for to be so inhospitable and unfeeling! What can have put that into your head?"

So he stayed.

Mrs. Johnson was his chief nurse, but there were times when she was too busy to be much with him. Her husband and the house had claims on her, and now that the patient was so much better, those could not always be put aside; so it came about that generally once a day there appeared, like a sunbeam in his room, the beautiful face of the station-master's niece.

Sometimes she sang to him, sometimes she read to him. Oftener still, when he seemed inclined to sleep, she sat back in a great easy-chair by the fire, as he had seen her first. They talked very little. He was too weak for much conversation, and she did not care to trust herself too much for fear her assumed composure should give way.

She little guessed the interest he took in her every movement; how her visit was the event of his day. And he amused himself in her absence by imagining a dozen theories about her.

It was a very strange, dangerously sweet time for her. And afterwards, in the change that crowded on her so soon, she liked to look back upon it.

But it could not last. Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy had begun to long for her return. Already Christmas was nearly upon them. Alan was better—so nearly well, in fact, that she could leave him without anxiety—not without pain, she knew quite well that could never be—and so she resisted all Mrs. Johnson's persuasions, and wrote to Colville-road to fix the day of her return.

Neither her host nor hostess knew of her destined profession, so they would not be able to tell it to Alan.

In a sweet, vague way she dreamed of his strolling into the Prince's Opera some night, and finding its principal singer in his little nurse.

But that was in the future, and the party was in the present, and full of pain.

She was to leave quite early in the day, so it was arranged she should say good-bye to Mr. Clare the night before.

Once, twice she hesitated to break the news, but her courage failed her; it was only when she was actually rising from her chair to end her last visit to him that she said, gently,—

"I shall not be here to-morrow night, Mr. Clare; so you will have to have suit for your companion."

It never dawned on him that she meant anything but a day's absence at most. He fancied it a spending one night from home; but even at the thought of that a cloud broke over his face.

"Going away! I shall miss you so."

"You will be believing yourself soon?"

He saw his mistake.

"Do you mean you will not return until am gone?" he asked, eagerly.

"I may not return at all—I am going home."

"I thought this was your home!"

She shook her head.

"I shall miss you so!"

"A little, perhaps, while you stay here."

"And afterwards?"

She shook her head once more.

"You will go out into the great world again, and in its strife and bustle you will forget it all and your nurse—or, if you remember her, it will only be as one of the objects in a long and tedious illness."

He looked on her reproachfully.

"Why will you distrust me so?"

"I do not—only men are forgetful often."

She might have said it was he who had taught her the lesson of mistrust, but she did not. If anyone in the world had reason to reproach him it was she; and yet, so unreasonable is a woman's heart, there was no harsh word for him on her lips. Her blue eyes were heavy with unshed tears as she thought of the weeks and months—the months and years that might pass ere they two met once more. And yet no thought of reviving her identity, and telling him the truth and who she really was, came to her.

Dora had suffered too much under her own name ever to care to recur to it; there was only one contingency in which she would ever call herself Miss Clifford again—and that contingency had not yet arrived.

Since that first night she had never touched his hand—their fingers had never met; now she went straight up to him with outstretched hand.

"What pretty fingers you have!" he cried, as he took them in his own. "Miss Johnson, they look made for fairyland!"

She drew them away quickly and turned to leave the room.

"We shall meet again," said Alan, firmly. "When I leave here and come to London, I shall make Mrs. Johnson entrust me with some commission to your mother."

Beatrice smiled—a strange, and, wistful smile—and then she turned away. That smile lingered in his memory for months.

And so for a second time happiness and love had been near him, though he knew it not!

CHAPTER XII.

A SPLENDID house near Hyde Park, furnished with everything wealth could purchase or luxury desire. Now-a-days if only people have money it is easy to obtain a magnificent abode. Good taste may be purchased like other adornments, and if a rich man places his house and cheque-book at the disposal of a West-end firm of furniture merchants he can go far wrong.

Montgomery House, therefore, had all the objects of luxury and art one used to associate with gentlemen's mansions. True its master was not a gentleman by birth or education, but he had an almost unlimited command of money. He was quite enough of a sycophant to toady men of higher rank; and he had married the beauty of the previous season, so that when he came up to town at the end of February he quite expected to get into society.

He had been married almost six months, and

if his conjugal felicity was not all he had anticipated, his wife was still the loveliest woman of the day.

"We do very well," he confided once to a boon companion. "You see, Joe, we can't afford to quarrel with each other; and Mrs. Smith has to be civil to me for fear I should cut off the supplies, and I have to put up with her little airs and graces because she was out-and-out the finest woman to be had last year."

That was how Mr. Montgomery Smith talked of his wife. This was the man for whose robes she had deserted an earl of high degree! Her husband was a man of nearly forty, with a florid face, a scanty, sandy moustache and whiskers, while his hair was of the exact shade of red vulgarly called carrots. He was a bad figure, and always contrived in the most carefully-selected toiles to look many shades less aristocratic than his own butler; but then he was enormously rich, and his wealth subdued the carrots—perhaps even gave them a golden tinge.

It was the first evening of their arrival in London, and they dined alone *à la carte*. Blanche Smith was to the full as beautiful as had been Miss Delaval. At present she had hardly realized the price she had paid for her wealth. A long honeymoon in a great southern city, where, instead of being thrown upon the society of Mr. Montgomery, she had been a reigning belle.

Christmas at a country seat crowded with guests, quite cut off from all old friends and old associations, she had had no time to repent her sacrifice, and to understand that she was bound in close life-long companionship to a man whom she could neither like nor respect.

She came down to the drawing-room ready dressed for dinner. The mirrors reflected her image and her husband's. They formed a striking contrast; a severe judge might have labelled their picture as purchaser and purchased—for Blanche Delaval had been just as truly bought by her husband's gold as had been the velvet pile carpet on which she stood.

"You look first-rate!" was his plain-spoken comment as his eyes took in her *tout ensemble*.

"I never saw a woman set off dress as you do!"

That was what he valued her for—as a lay figure to wear his silks and jewels. But she had sold herself with her eyes open—she had no right to complain.

"Whoever d'ye think I met to-day?" asked Mr. Montgomery Smith, after a pause.

"I have no idea."

"Old friends of yours."

"Who was it?" a strange interest in her voice.

"Do tell me, James!"

"That pretty little Mrs. Fane—your guardian's wife—an awfully stylish-looking woman! Why ever wasn't she at your wedding, Blanche? She'd have been worth having."

It was the one counter demonstration Bae had permitted herself. She would not come to Blanche's sale as she persisted in calling it. Her husband had given away his ward, but the ceremony took place from the house of some connection of the Delavals, and it was announced that Mrs. Fane was too delicate to leave home.

"Bae is always worth looking at!" remarked Mrs. Montgomery Smith. "Did she say when she was coming to see me?"

"She never mentioned your name. Her one idea seemed to be to get away. She'd some awful swell with her; perhaps she was afraid I should go and tell tales to her husband!"

"Bae would not care. She and the Captain are too much attached for anyone to divide them."

"Oh! very devoted, are they? Well, this was a very handsome fellow she had with her—quite one of the upper ten. And she was awfully intimate with him, called him Alan!"

Blanche Delaval—I beg pardon, Smith—was a woman of the world, so she heard that name quite unmoved, and said, calmly,—

"You have got a wrong idea, James. If she called him Alan, it was her brother, the Earl of St. Clare."

"Lord St. Clare!" repeated the cotton prince, with that intense respect only parvenus attach to rank. "Dear me! I didn't know she was sister to an earl."

"It's a pity people don't go about tickled with their connections to the peerage on their backs; it would save you such a deal of trouble, James. You would know just the right amount of courtesy to pay to each particular individual!"

He was not a clever man, but he was quite sharp enough to know his wife was laughing at him. Anyone with more sensitive feelings might have been hurt.

Mr. Montgomery Smith only resolved to pay his better-half out at the first opportunity.

It was not long in coming. That very evening he heard her give some order to the butler, and he immediately, in her presence, contradicted it flatly. The servant looked confused. So he added this polite threat,—

"You'd best attend to my orders, my man. I have to pay you your wages, so I've a right to give what directions I please!"

Two pink spots burned furiously on Blanche's white cheeks. Directly the man had retreated she stood before her husband with flashing eyes.

"Why do you insult me before the servants?" she asked scornfully; "you will make our differences their by-word. Surely, as mistress of the house, I may have an opinion!"

"As many opinions as you like if you keep them to yourself. Look here, Blanche, I don't want to quarrel with you, but I mean to be master. You promised to obey me, remember, and you'll have to do it!"

"And if I refuse?"

She looked at him with dilated nostrils, a world of contempt in her eyes.

"I don't think you will be so foolish."

"I will not be the slave of any man's whims—especially yours. You think of nothing but money; I believe you fancy it can do everything in the world!"

"It can't save life," he said, coldly; "but it can do most things else. I know it has bought me everything I wanted to possess—yourself among them!"

It was true—she could not deny it.

"You had better not get restive!" he said, with a cunning smile; "you would only have the worst of it. I have broken in many a wild horse and savage dog; I dare say I could tame a headstrong woman if I tried!"

Her teeth were clenched with anger—her lips quivered with vexation.

"You'd much better be friends with me," he argued. "You know we've chosen each other, and we'd both better make the best of our bargain."

"If you regret yours—"

"I don't say I do; and if I regretted it ever so it wouldn't be altered! You are Mrs. James Montgomery Smith, and provided you do the honours of my house nicely, and keep up your beauty and good looks, and a civil tongue in your head, I'm very well content."

His wife looked steadily at him. He winced under the gaze, but was powerless to destroy the spell of it.

"Why do you look like that?" he demanded.

"I was wondering why you married me!"

"I was a fool to! Well, I can soon tell you."

"It was not love," she said, wearily; "I know that!"

"Well, you were the prettiest thing out; and it was rumoured your price was heavy. I bet a fellow a couple of pounds I'd get you in three months—and, as we were married ten weeks afterwards, I won my fifty pounds very comfortably!"

He turned to go. Blanche knew he would be playing billiards at his club until it closed. He generally spent his evenings apart from her if they chanced to be without company, and, so far from missing him, she found his absence a true relief.

Left alone, the wretched wife flung herself upon the sofa, and gave way to a few bitter tears. She had cast Alan Deno's love from her—she had done her best to break his noble heart—and for what! To marry a man who could make her the subject of a bet—who frankly told her he had no affection for her.

"Well!" said Mrs. Montgomery Smith, "

suppose I ought not to complain; I have everything I bargained for—riches, jewels, luxuries! I imagine James and I are supposed to exist without heirs; for though everything else was mentioned in the settlement, those little possessions were left out. I'm not sure that I should care to leave James, but yet I don't like being told flatly I was married to be the permanent ornament of his table, and nothing more.

"So Alan is back. I wonder if they have heard anything of that wretched girl! Perhaps she is dead, and Alan is rich after all! I hope not. If anything could make me more wretched than I am it would be the knowing that if I had waited I could have satisfied both my love and my ambition."

She rose to retire to her own room. It did not lessen her anguish as she swept across the room that her dress was the most expensive in London. It did not make her happier when she laid her head on her lonely pillow that it was covered in muslin, trimmed with lace.

Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery Smith were not quite the success in society the head of the firm had expected. Certainly they were not ignored; at all large gatherings the cotton prince and his beautiful bride were welcome guests; but those small, select "at homes," those *recherché* garden-parties, those cosy, informal dinners which are the cream of social entertainments, did not number the pair among their guests.

There are certain gatherings to be asked to which is a proof not only that you are in society, but of it. To these Blanche and her husband were not bidden.

"I can't make it out," remarked James, as he read a list of the guests at the Duchess of Burnham's "at home." "Here are the Fanees' names, and Herbert Cecil's. Now, Fane can't have eight hundred a-year, and Cecil is quite a pauper! How can her Grace care to fill her rooms with such paltry folks, who can't ask her to have a bit or sup in return, while she leaves us, who could entertain her royally, out in the cold!"

Blanche answered nothing. To her mind the reason was patent, but all the same she was annoyed at it. No woman likes to feel she has sunk in the social scale by marriage, especially if the marriage itself is an unhappy one.

"It's all your fault!" growled James. "You never cultivate your own relations. I don't believe you've been near Mrs. Fane since you came to town!"

"I called once, but she was out, and when she came here I had gone to Hurlingham."

"Well, you'd better call again. I'm sure it's time. You might offer to take her for a drive; they can't keep a carriage at their poky little place!"

Blanche had to yield. She ordered her footman to direct the coachman to drive to that "poky little place," and was more troubled than pleased to find that her ex guardian's wife was at home.

It was the first time they had met since Blanche left Captain Fane's roof. They both felt a certain stiffness in renewing their interrupted intimacy. Bee, in her soft, grey dress, looked far younger than the haughty beauty, who was muffled in Russian sables; but there was a sadness on the latter's face which broke down all Mrs. Fane's resentment. She took Blanche into her arms with that pretty, motherly air which had so cheered Dora Clifford, and kissed her warmly on the cheek.

"My dear girl! I thought you were never coming to see me!"

"I thought you would not care!" replied Blanche, in a low voice.

"I never forget old friends. Sit down and be cosy. Let me undo your furs."

It was so simple, so homelike; so like the dear old times that could never come again, that the tears stood in Mrs. Smith's eyes; but Bee would not seem to see them.

"You look a magnificent matron truly!" touching the sables with her slim fingers. "And are you happy?"

It was out, in spite of herself, the question she had not meant to put.

"Who believes in happiness except children

and lovers!" asked Blanche, a little bitterly. "I have everything I want, and James never refuses me money."

Bee sighed.

"And is there any chance of your having a treasure money cannot purchase? Are you converted to baby worship, Blanche?"

Blanche shook her head.

"There is no such chance—I hope there never will be; I detest children, Bee."

"An old friend of yours has been staying here," anxious to change the subject, "Herbert Cecil; do you remember him?"

"Perfectly, he was your brother's favourite friend."

"Not was," corrected Bee, "he is so still. Directly Alan came home he sought him out."

"Lord St. Clare is in England then?"

"Yes! I wonder you have not met him, but he goes very little into society; he says he is tired of it, and I cannot urge the point because he is still far from being what he was before the accident."

"I never heard of that. What was it?"

Bee told her shortly, adding gratefully—"Only the greatest care saved him. He never sent for us—never even let us know he was in England; it was only when he was convalescent that he came here."

"And he is staying with you now!"

"Yes."

A silence so long and deep that Bee felt it almost impossible to break it; she hailed it as a relief when the door opened, hoping it was the servant showing in another visitor, but the visitor this time was a self-announced one, and the last person in the world she wished to see—her much-loved brother, Alan, Earl of St. Clare.

No one but Bee knew how earnestly she had longed he should not meet his fair, false love of other days. She knew how strong his passion had been, and she feared the witchery of Blanche's beauty, the fascinations of her wiles, might once again unchain his heart.

She need not have feared, not a muscle of his face changed. With the most perfect courtesy, but with the utmost calmness, Alan advanced to Mrs. Smith's side with outstretched hand, saying—

"I fear my felicitations come rather tardily, but I hope you will allow me to offer you my best congratulations upon your marriage."

(To be continued.)

In Sweden the food given to reindeer is "reindeer moss," a lichen highly prized by the Lapps, and which grows abundantly in the Arctic regions—almost as luxuriantly on bare rocks as in the soil. It covers extensive tracts in Lapland, making the summer landscape look like a field of snow. The domesticated reindeer are never as large as the wild ones. The domesticated Siberian reindeer are larger than those of Lapland. No care at all is taken of the deer. They thrive best by being permitted to roam in droves and obtain their own sustenance. The moss can be used as human food, the taste being slightly acid. Attempts have been made to feed hay, roots, grates, of ceters, to the reindeer, but they have not succeeded.



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FACETIÆ.

TRIDDE: "What are woman's rights, papa?"
His father: "Everything they want, my boy; always remember that."

"Was that your sister I saw you with last night?" "Not when you saw me. I hadn't proposed then."

"SWEDDLE, what sort of a wheel are you going to ride this year?" "I'm pushing a four-wheeled baby carriage this year, Throbbins."

"No; they are too dangerous. I don't allow my wife to wear hatpins." "Then how do you clean your pipe?"

FRIEND: "Do thoughts that came to you long ago ever return?" Scribbler: "Oh, yes—if I enclose a stamped envelope."

"MRS LIGHTHEAD, what have you ever done for posterity?" "I've had my photograph taken more than fifty times."

"OUR paper is very conservative," said the editor. "Especially in the matter of the jokes it prints," said the man who read them.

PAOK HENRY: "That sad-faced man over there looks as though he had loved but lost." Henry Peck: "No. He loved and won."

GLADYS: "Do you think Charley means business?" "May: "I can't tell yet; but I'm afraid he only means poetry."

Mrs SPUDE: "Oh, her mother-in-law has been awfully good to her." Mrs. Gossp: "How so?" Mrs. Spude: "Quarrelled with her on her first visit, and never been near her since."

"I BELIEVE," said Trusser, "that Blowit aims to tell the truth." "You may be right," retorted Jokeley; "but if so, he is certainly the worst marksman I ever saw—or heard."

FRIEND: "A learned man like you with a dictionary on your desk?" Professor: "It's for the benefit of my friends who want to talk to me."

"You have been very good this morning, Willie," said the fond mamma. "Now, what reward would you like?" "I would like to be naughty all the afternoon."

"A MAN," she said, "never knows when he is well off." "True," he replied; "and it's a good thing for women who do not care to be old maids that he doesn't."

"WHEN I visit Blackpool in the summer I always pay a visit to my old landlady." "Well, I suppose it's only right that you should pay her something, old man."

DORA: "Yes, Huggleton certainly is getting to be quite a social lion." Flora (blushing): "Dear me, do you think so? It seems to me he acts more like a bear."

OFFICE-BOY: "Please, sir, can I get off this afternoon? My grandmother's dead." His chief: "Yes; but it's too bad. I was going to give you my ticket for the cricket match!"

"How came you to have such a short nose?" asked a city dandy of a country boy. "So that I should not be poking it into other people's business," was the reply.

"I MET that red-haired Jones girl to-day," remarked the young woman. "Tut, tut, my dear!" cautioned her mother. "Her hair is auburn now. She has just inherited a fortune."

A BURGALAR, in trying to make his escape from the roof of a house, missed his footing, and fell through the roof of a neighbouring conservatory. The family, hearing the crash, ran in haste to discover the cause, and found the burglar coolly picking the pieces of glass from his clothes. "What are you doing here?" thundered the owner. "I just dropped in," coolly replied the man.

"HAS George ever hinted that he had thought of you as a possible wife?" asked the anxious mother. "No," replied the girl, a far-away look in her eyes; "and I'm afraid he never will." "Why," said the mother, "I thought—" "It doesn't matter what you thought, mamma, dear," interrupted the daughter. "Only last night he complained of feeling drowsy, and it wasn't 9 o'clock."

HIGGINBOTHAM: "I've just seen a wonderful invention—a fine silk umbrella that can be turned into a first-class cane with very little effort." Cadwallader: "That's nothing. I owned a fine silk umbrella that with no effort at all, simply by leaving it an hour in the rack at a political meeting, turned into a third-class gingham."

He was an assistant in a large bookseller's, and the haughty young woman who fancied she was called upon to give her ideas to the world in book form desired a note-book. "I want a note-book," she said, "something that I can carry in my pocket to jot down ideas—" "Oh, you want something very small," replied the assistant, and he was unable to account for her anger.

NEW GIRL: "Please, mum, while you're in town, would ye be so kind as to order me a pair o' shoes?" Mrs. De Style: "I—or—do not know your size." New Girl: "Nor I, mum; but I think if ye get them about the size of yours, they'll do." Mrs. De Style (hesitatingly): "Do you think you could wear them?" New Girl: "Oh, yes, mum. After new shoes is wet they shrink."

THE father of a family, becoming annoyed at the fault-finding of his children over their food, exclaimed in a rage one day at dinner: "You children are intolerable; you turn up your noses at everything. When I was a boy I was often glad enough to get dry bread to eat." "Poor papa!" said Rose, the pet of the family; "I am so glad you are having such nice times now, living with mamma and us."

MRS. BRINKLEY: "George, why will you go on working so hard? I must insist that you give up the extra duties that you have taken upon yourself of late. You are simply wearing yourself out. What's the use of it?" Mr. Brinkley: "Well, my dear, you said you would have to discharge the girl, and do our cooking yourself if I didn't earn more money. I'm going to keep you from that, even if I have to work all night as well as all day."

"WHAT in the name of Jupiter did you sew up all the pockets in my coat for this morning?" "Dearest, that letter I gave you to post was very important, and I intended to make sure you carried it in your hand."

"SMOKING in Holland," said a traveller, "is so common that it is impossible to tell one person from another in a room of smokers." "How is any one who happens to be wanted picked out, then?" asked a listener. "Oh, a waiter goes round with a pair of bellows and blows the smoke from before each face till he recognises the person called for. Fact, gentlemen."

A STORY is told of a Yorkshire funeral. The husband, who mourned the loss of his young wife, was urged by the undertaker to take his seat next his mother-in-law. He refused. Again and again the master of the ceremonies pressed the suggestion, adding that it was the correct thing. "If I must do," replied the chief mourner, "I will, but it'll spoil my pleasure for to-day!"

MRS YOUNGWIFE: "Thank goodness, I've got the worst of my spring-cleaning done." Mrs. Neighbour: "What! All by yourself?" Mrs. Youngwife: "H'm—no. I got my husband to-day to take up the carpets, beat them, take the beds apart, and polish the furniture, and—" Mrs. Neighbour: "Oh! Then he stayed home all day?" Mrs. Youngwife: "Yes. He said he felt so ill, and he looked so wretched when he got up this morning, that I wouldn't let him go to the office."

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SOCIETY.

THE German Emperor will leave Germany to visit Her Majesty at Windsor on November 20th. This visit is to be of a private nature as is consistent with his Majesty's position.

THE Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha has been entertaining a large party of shooting guests at his Schloss in the Tyrol. Schloss Hintern is one of the most beautiful royal residences in Europe, and is a favourite home of the Duke. It is situated in the midst of a most beautiful country, and is surrounded by some of the best and most extensive shooting in Germany.

THE Hereditary Prince and Princess Hohenlohe-Langenburg, who have been at Balmoral on a visit to the Queen, remained there several weeks. The Hereditary Princess ne Princess Alexandra of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, is the third daughter of the Duke of Coburg, and the youngest married granddaughter of the Queen. Her Royal Highness was married to the Hereditary Prince of Hohenlohe-Langenburg (a great nephew of Her Majesty on April 20th, 1890, and is the mother of a son and a daughter. She completed her twenty-first year on September 1st.

THE sum of five thousand pounds is to be expended upon the reception of the Queen at Bristol, and the several entertainments that are to be given in connection with Her Majesty's visit on November 15th. One very memorable event will be the provision of a substantial entertainment—including a meal—for the poor. At present arranged the Queen will arrive in Bristol shortly before two o'clock, and proceed round several main thoroughfares to the Convalescent Home on Durdham Down. Before the ceremony of opening the Royal Jubilee Convalescent Home an address will be presented to Her Majesty by the Lord Mayor.

THE little ex-Queen Mercedes of Spain is perhaps the most picturesque figure in that much-troubled Court. Upon the death of her father she became the reigning, though not ruling, Queen, but her crown was taken from her when her brother was born six months later. She is a rather slight, serious young woman, with a modest bearing, and her sympathies are with the poorer classes. R-jolting and dancing she believes to be out of place in the present condition of the country, and when it was proposed that her seventeenth birthday should be celebrated by a grand State ball, she begged instead that it might be honoured by her appointment to the presidency of the Red Cross Society of Spain.

THE German Emperor and Empress are having a great many illustrious visitors at Potsdam during the present month, including the Emperor and Empress of Russia, who live during their sojourn at the Stadtschloss at Potsdam, which was especially prepared and renovated for their reception. Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and her mother, Queen Emma, are also spending a few days at Potsdam with the German Emperor and Empress, and other visitors are the Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, with her eldest daughter; the Duchess of Albany, with the young Duke and the Princess Alice; and the King of Greece, who wishes to discuss some important matters with Kaiser Wilhelm.

THE Duchess of Albany is with her son in the Netherlands. Her Royal Highness is much pleased by the engagement of her younger sister, Princess Elizabeth of Waldeck-Pyrmont—who has so frequently stayed with her at Claremont—to Count Alexander of Erbach-Schönberg. The bridegroom-elect is the eldest son of the late Prince Henry of Battenberg's only sister. He is in the Hessian Dragoons, and is twenty-seven. Princess Elizabeth is a year his junior, and is a very amiable and charming Princess, and is also very good-looking. Her only brother, the reigning Prince of Waldeck-Pyrmont, is nearer to her in age than her sisters, being eight years her senior. The Queen-mother of Holland, the Duchess of Albany, and the Hereditary Princess of Bonthelm-Steinfurt are considerably her seniors, while her small step-brother, Prince Wolrad Frederic, is eight.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 9,000 cells in a square foot of honeycomb.

THE fly lays four times each summer, and 80 eggs each time.

THE number of people at present who speak English is said to be 116,000,000.

THE nourishment in three baked bananas, weighing 1 lb., is equal to that of 26 lbs. of bread.

It would require the power of a 10,000 horse-power engine about 70,000,000,000 years to lift the earth 1 ft. in height, and to do this work it would require more water than would be discharged at the mouth of the Mississippi River in 60,000 years.

GEMS.

ONLY those can sing in the dark who have a light in the heart.

DEFEAT is one of the hardest things to bear, even in trifles; but we have to be defeated in order to succeed.

AN ounce of essence is worth a gallon of fluid. A wise saw may be more valuable than a whole book, and a plain truth is better than an argument.

If we desire to reduce mental activity, it stands to reason that we must attend to nothing. We must let the mind drift. We must not attempt to exercise any control whatever, but let the thoughts stray as they will and follow any line of association that is a line of least resistance.

THE vulgar do not often recognise their own ear-marks. These are as many as the manifestations of temperament; indications of vulgarity are not confined to speech and manners. One may be vulgar in one's house and furniture, one's dress, and in many other matters that are apt to be overlooked when a self-scrutiny is undertaken.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SEVEN-CUP PUDDING.—One cup bread-crumbs, one cup flour, one cup sugar, one cup currants, one cup raisins, one cup chopped suet, one cup milk, one egg, half-teaspoonful baking soda, one teaspoonful spices. Mix all the dry things, then the egg and the milk together, and stir it in among the dry things; give it a good mixing; put it in a greased basin, cover with a bit of buttered paper, and steam for two hours; turn out, and have a nice warm sauce with it; use a teaspoon to measure it with. Sauce—one tablespoonful flour, one tablespoonful sugar, a little nutmeg, one and a-half breakfast cups milk; mix all, and stir till it boils.

WEDDING CAKE.—This will weigh more than three pounds. One pound flour, half-pound butter, half-pound sugar, six eggs, one pound raisins, one pound currants, quarter-pound peel, one nutmeg, one dessertspoonful mace and cinnamon, one wine glass milk; beat the butter and sugar to a cream, then put in the yolks of the eggs and mix well, beat up the whites and add them time about with the flour, a little at a time, mix well, then add all the fruit nicely prepared, then the spices and the milk, give all a good beating up, and bake in a slow oven two hours; icing, half-pound icing sugar, one or two whites of eggs, half-pound ground almonds; mix the almonds and sugar together, then drop in white of egg till it is just barely moistened, spread it on the cake; it should be very dry or it will run off, and the cake must be cold; ice this over the top with white icing made with half-pound icing sugar and white of egg, mixed.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE English residents of Rome have a free hospital.

OYSTERS are such nervous creatures that a sudden shock, such as a loud thunderclap, will kill a whole boatload.

THE greatest force known to science is that produced by the contraction and expansion of metals, resulting from the action of heat and cold.

THE test for symmetry is to turn a man with his face to the wall. His chest should touch it, his nose should be four inches away, his thighs five, and the tips of his toes three.

THE most curious paperweight in the world is said to belong to the Prince of Wales. It is the mummied hand of one of the daughters of Pharaoh.

PROBABLY the most extraordinary journal in the world is published weekly at Athens. It is written entirely in verse, even to the advertisements.

ONE mode of selling turquoises at the great Russian fair held at Nijni Novgorod is curious. A person, on payment of a fixed sum, is allowed to plunge his hand into a bag full of them, and to become the possessor of the handful.

IN Nagasaki, Japan, there is a firework-maker who manufactures pyrotechnic birds of great size that, when exploded, sail in a lifelike manner through the air, and perform many movements exactly like those of living birds. The secret of making these wonderful things has been in the possession of the eldest of the family of each generation for more than four hundred years.

WATER is an excellent transmitter of sound. A scientist by the name of Callaud made some experiments on Lake Geneva, Switzerland, to demonstrate the power of sound to travel a long way in water. A clock was made to strike under the water, and was heard to a distance of twelve miles. In a second experiment the striking of a clock was heard to a distance of twenty-seven.

THE most beautiful and costly fishes in the world come from China, and the rarest and most expensive of all is the brush-tail goldfish. Specimens of these have sold for as high as £140 each, and in Europe the prices range from £50 to £100. The brush-tail goldfish is so small that a five-shilling piece will cover it, and probably there is no living thing of its size and weight that is worth so much money.

THE progress made of late years by Russia in the iron industry has been a notable one. The best proof of the development of this industry is found in the production of iron ore, which, during the period extending between 1883 and 1892, only increased at the rate of 8,500,000 poods annually, whereas, from 1893 to 1896, this increase was 5,500,000 poods a year, and in 1897 it rose to 112,000,000 poods, being a sudden rise of 15,000,000.

THE giant of the earthworms is a creature of Australia. Although it is a monster from 4 ft. to 6 ft. in length and from 1 in. to 1½ in. in diameter, it is as harmless as our common earthworm, which is much resembles both in colour and bodily structure. Like our earthworm, it can only be removed from its burrows with great difficulty. If a portion of the creature's body be uncovered and grasped, with the intention of pulling it from its burrow, the worm will hold to the sides of its den until its body is pulled in two.

A CURIOUS story is told of the origin of ox-tail soup. During the Reign of Terror in Paris, many of the nobility were reduced to starvation and beggary. In those days the butchers sent their hides fresh to the tanneries without removing the tails, and in cleaning them the tails were thrown away. One of these noble beggars asked for a tail, and it was willingly given to him; he took it to his home and made (what is now famous) the first dish of ox-tail soup. He told others of his good luck, and they annoyed the tanners so much, that a price was put upon the ox-tails.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CONFUSED.—You had better consult a solicitor. Much depends on the terms of the settlement.

IGNORANT.—"Daphne" is pronounced "Daf-in," "Eileen," "I-lee," "Moyna," "Moi-ra."

CURRY.—Girls should refuse to allow a single kiss until after a lover has proposed and been accepted.

UNLUCKY.—We fear you have not looked sufficiently into the conditions of the lease. You had better consult a legal mind.

MARRIAGE.—You ought not to allow him to do anything which would bring you into notice without being sure that your people would not object.

COUNCIL.—The nephew takes all, to the entire exclusion of cousins; he is what is called in the line of descent; they are in the lateral or side line, and do not come in until the descent is exhausted.

S. A. J.—Your father is right when he insists upon investigating the young man's business standing and private character, as well as his antecedents, before he consents to your becoming engaged to him.

F. C.—Fly marks can be cleaned off the frames with soap and water used sparingly on the end of the finger covered by a piece of rag. When all are cleared off, wash with cold water and dry with cambric leather.

CARPET.—To bleach a straw hat, put it in a deep, airtight box; place at the bottom a stone, and on this a piece of red-hot iron or a pan of charcoal, on which is sprinkled brimstone. Let the hat remain in this box all night.

H. S.—The sensible thing to do is to see that the temperature of the water in cold weather is not lower than that of the air. A daily bath is a most healthful practice; but it should not be so cold as to give a shock to the system.

WILD IRISH CURATE.—We have made every inquiry, and are sorry to say we cannot learn of any way of restoring the colour to that sort of material. Those kind of waterproofs deteriorate almost as soon when put away as with occasional use. Perhaps the makers of the garment can advise you.

MIRAGE.—The word *Miraj* signifies a sign or token of a covenant between two persons, and comprehends the words, "The Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another." It originated in the covenant between Laban and Jacob, a description of which will be found in the Bible—Genesis, chap. xxxi, verses 44 to 52.

WOULD HONEYKEEPER.—There is no cure for your moth-infested sofa, except re-stuffing; the interior is so saturated with the eggs of the insects that the latter are bound to re-appear, and re-create the damage after every survey such as you have now made; re-stuffing is not formidable enough to frighten you by its cost, seeing it would save the sofa.

MATROON.—It is much a matter of taste. Men, as a rule, do not like women to be very tall, but very often one sees a short man much attracted by an unusually tall woman. If you wish to walk gracefully, and to avoid calling attention to your own height, you must try to forget yourself and the impression you may be making on others altogether.

O. J.—The great advantage of the Suez Canal is the shortening of the distance between Europe and India. From London or Hamburg to Bombay by way of the Cape of Good Hope is about 11,200 miles, but by way of the Canal only 6,300, or a saving of about twenty-four days. From Marseilles or Genoa there is a saving of thirty days; from Trieste, of thirty-seven days.

FURNISH.—Bank-notes are not money; the oblong piece of paper marked £100 is not in itself worth a penny; but notes represent money as postage stamps and orders, and bank cheques and orders do also; those who lend them agree to pay the holders money for them on demand; money is coin, and sterling money is just pure money.

AMUSE.—We can only advise you to marry the man you love best, if his character and circumstances justify it. You certainly cannot marry both. What your life will be in the future is impossible for you to know, and there is very little sense in worrying about possible happenings. Consider the question seriously and not as an interesting complication.

HAROLD.—By all means use your own discretion. If there is nothing else to render the marriage incompatible the difference of ages is very trifling. There can be nothing wrong in marrying a girl older than yourself, especially only thirteen months. The question to be discussed is the suitability of the persons in other respects.

W. G.—Going over it carefully with a camel's hair brush, dipped frequently in well-warmed spirits of wine. The spirits should be heated and kept hot by standing the bottle containing it in a bowl of warm water while you are at work. You should not rub much with the brush, but steadily draw it over the gliding to be cleaned, always moving the brush in the same direction.

WEARY MOTHER.—A good way to entertain a sick child who cannot sit up is to arrange a mirror on an easel in such a way as to reflect the moving panorama to be seen from the window, or, if street scenes weary him, the glass can be made to reflect the restful blue sky and white clouds. If no easel is at hand, an upright stick fastened to the back of a chair will answer the purpose. *© 1899 THE LONDON READER.*

BARBARA.—For Hamburg cream, stir together in an enamelled pan the grated rind and juice of two large lemons, one cupful of sugar, and the well-beaten yolks of eight eggs. Beat the pan into another one of boiling water, and stir constantly for three minutes; take from the fire and pour in the well-beaten whites of the eggs, stirring lightly. Pile in a glass dish, or in custard cups, and serve cold.

WELL-WISHER.—Good breeding is not merely the superficial politeness found in society; it is a general walk in life which always avoids giving unnecessary pain, which strikes self, and which is uniformly kind to all people. Good-breeding, the art of always being frank and yet dignified, of patient self-control, of thought for others, of kindness to all, is as general as the gift of a heart.

S. R. E.—It is a subject on which everyone should form his or her own opinion, without reference to the prejudices or principles of others. Personally, we see no harm in it whatever, but could not undertake to give you reasons for and against. We imagine there are few people nowadays who are so bigoted and narrow-minded as to condemn it without knowing anything at all about it.

ALFRED.—Goldfish can be placed in a small pond, where they will thrive and multiply. In fact, it is far better to keep them in the basins of fountains or in small ponds, as aquariums, unless very roomy, afford very poor accommodations for these finny pets. When fully grown they are bright orange above, lighter on the sides, and whitish below; but when young the colour is dark, and when old it fades to a silvery white.

MILLCENT.—The invitations for a wedding should be sent out about three weeks before the day upon which the ceremony is to take place. Wedding presents, with the cards of the givers, are sent soon after receiving invitations for the ceremony, and they are always displayed in a room specially devoted to them. At the present time the cards of the givers are often removed from the gifts.

YOUR MEMORY.

You are so dear to me that every blossom wakes
A memory that no rain or sunny takes,
Though sad earth's pain,
Her years may pass away,
And leave their shadows gray—
Dear heart,
Your memory must remain.

Though Time shall take beyond the things so dear,
And leave a desert darkly cold and drear,
Where flowers have lain;
Through skies still sweetly blue
Mine eyes shall turn to you,
Dear heart,
Your memory must remain.

Though Death should claim, dear love, one heart of ours
Love lives anew in God's perennial bowers,
Despair is vain,
And at life's fading beam,
Like echoes of a dream,
Dear heart,
Your memory must remain.

MEMORY.—The four seasons are said generally to begin on the first of the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth months of the year. Others, who desire to be more particular, make spring commence about the middle of February and end about the middle of May, when summer begins; and so on for the other seasons. There seems to be some possibility in adopting the latter system of computation.

RIO.—The Gulf Stream is the current which issues from the Gulf of Mexico and carries the heat of the Caribbean Sea across the northern Atlantic to the shores of Scotland and Norway. This tropical river flowing steadily through the cold water of the ocean warms England from the snows of Labrador. Should it by any chance break through the isthmus of Panama Great Britain would be condemned to eternal glaciers.

M. K.—Soak well to loosen old starch and dirt; brush firmly on the washing board, first on one side then another, particularly attending to edges and button-holes; give two hot soapy waters before boiling, and rinse very thoroughly; this applies specially to collars, from which the sweet stains must be carefully brushed out, or they will reappear at ironing; blue and wring them well, fasten together, and hang up in clean place to dry.

FAIR MAID OF PERSE.—Put the stained part in cold water, then apply a lotion made of one teaspoonful of lemon-juice, one tablespoonful of the purest cream of tartar, and one teaspoonful of oxalic acid. Put it all into a pint of distilled or rain-water; shake it before using, and apply with a soft cloth till the spot is saturated with the lotion; then sponge it off again in clean, cold water. Repeat this operation until the stain disappears.

HOUSEWIFE.—A good furniture polish can be made with an equal admixture of sweet oil and vinegar. This must be used constantly, and the furniture afterwards well rubbed with a cambric leather. This is an excellent polish for mahogany. Furniture cream for polishing wood is made with two ounces of pearlash, one gallon of soft water, one pound of beeswax, a quart of a pound of soap; boil until dissolved; spread it with a painter's brush, and polish off with a leather.

FRECKLES.—To remove freckles and sunburn, take an ounce of lemon-juice, quarter of drachm of powdered borax and half a drachm of sugar; mix and let them stand a few days in a glass bottle, then rub on the face occasionally; another way—wash the face with good buttermilk at night before retiring; let it "dry on," and wash off next morning; of course no remedy is effectual without care being taken to shield the face from the sun.

DIETRESSEN.—An eminent medical authority says that stammering is caused by attempting to speak with empty lungs. In singing, the lungs are kept well inflated, and there is no stammering. The method of cure is to require the patient to keep his lungs well filled, to draw frequent long breaths, to speak loud, and to pause on the instant of finding embarrassment in his speech, taking a long inspiration before he goes on again.

BEER.—The best and safest plan is to put in the carefully-picked-over fruit, and bring it to the boil by itself, and let it boil for a minute or two. Then add the sugar. This is said to prevent fermentation, and should certainly always be done if only three-quarters of a pound of sugar is used. If allowed to boil slowly the colour is sure to be spoilt. As regards the time for boiling the jam, that is a hard matter—usually about ten to twenty minutes.

G. M.—It is the prerogative of the Crown of England to convvoke, continue, or dissolve Parliament. Parliament is prorogued at the close of each session to some future date by the Sovereign, generally by writ under the great seal or by commission. Parliament can be dissolved by the sovereign before the expiration of its natural term of seven years; but while the power to do these things rests nominally with the Sovereign it is really exercised by the Ministry in power for the time being.

BERRY.—Put carefully-gathered and very ripe raspberries into jars, and, when as full as they will hold of the fruit, fill up the jars with good vinegar. After eight or ten days the vinegar is poured off, and the fruit allowed to drain for some hours. The mixture of vinegar and juice thus obtained is added to another quantity of fruit and treated in the same way. This is sometimes repeated a third time, and then the liquid is gently boiled for about five minutes with its own weight of good sugar.

V. F.—Clean it out thoroughly inside and outside with plenty of soap and water; then if you wish to get off the thin outer surface, so as to polish the shell, rub it off carefully and well with fine brickdust and water. Having got it cleared, then rub with fresh woollen rag and dry whitening, to smooth the surface; then slightly moisten with vinegar, and further rub with dry whitening. Or you can send it to the taxidermist or naturalist, who will thoroughly do it up for you, as the process needs a good deal of patient work.

WORKMEN.—Constant shaking of the curtains, brushing and dusting the carpets, and allowing in plenty of fresh air, and generally disturbing the insects. Dusting over the rooms with a mixture of freshly-ground pepper and pounded camphor if the rooms are to be shut up, and in any case this mixture should be well shaken or dusted over clothes hung in presses, or packed away in chests or drawers. Fresh air and constant disturbance is the best remedy; if you fight them in that way daily through the season you will save your things.

H. M. S.—The following is the simplest and least expensive of the several forms of sponge cake. Separate the whites and yolks of six eggs; beat the yolks well; add two cups of powdered sugar; beat again from five to ten minutes; then add two tablespoonfuls of milk, a pinch of salt and a little flavour. Now add part of the beaten whites of the eggs and two cups of flour, sifted together with two tablespoonfuls of baking powder; stir them in slowly and lightly, and lastly, add the remainder of the white of eggs. Line the tin with buttered paper and fill two-thirds full.

LAL.—Try stirring the starch slightly when making it with a pure paraffin candle. Or the sticking may be caused if the article to be ironed is too much dampened, or because your iron is not properly clean and polished. They ought to be carefully cleaned with emery paper and brick-dust before you put them to heat, and after they are heated it is often found useful to rub them on powdered brick-dust sprinkled on either a piece of brown paper or a board kept for the purpose, the dust being at once rubbed off with a dry duster. The iron should then be passed over a paper greased with white wax, again rubbed with a clean duster.

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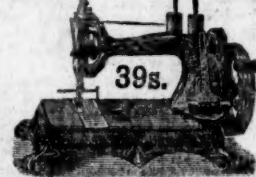
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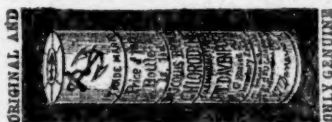
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